Guitar MAGAZINE

OCT 2021
ISSUE 397
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WIN
A BOUTIQUE FUZZ FROM BEETRONICS

JOE BONAMASSA

OUT OF LOCKDOWN AND BACK ON THE ROAD WITH AN EPIC NEW ALBUM

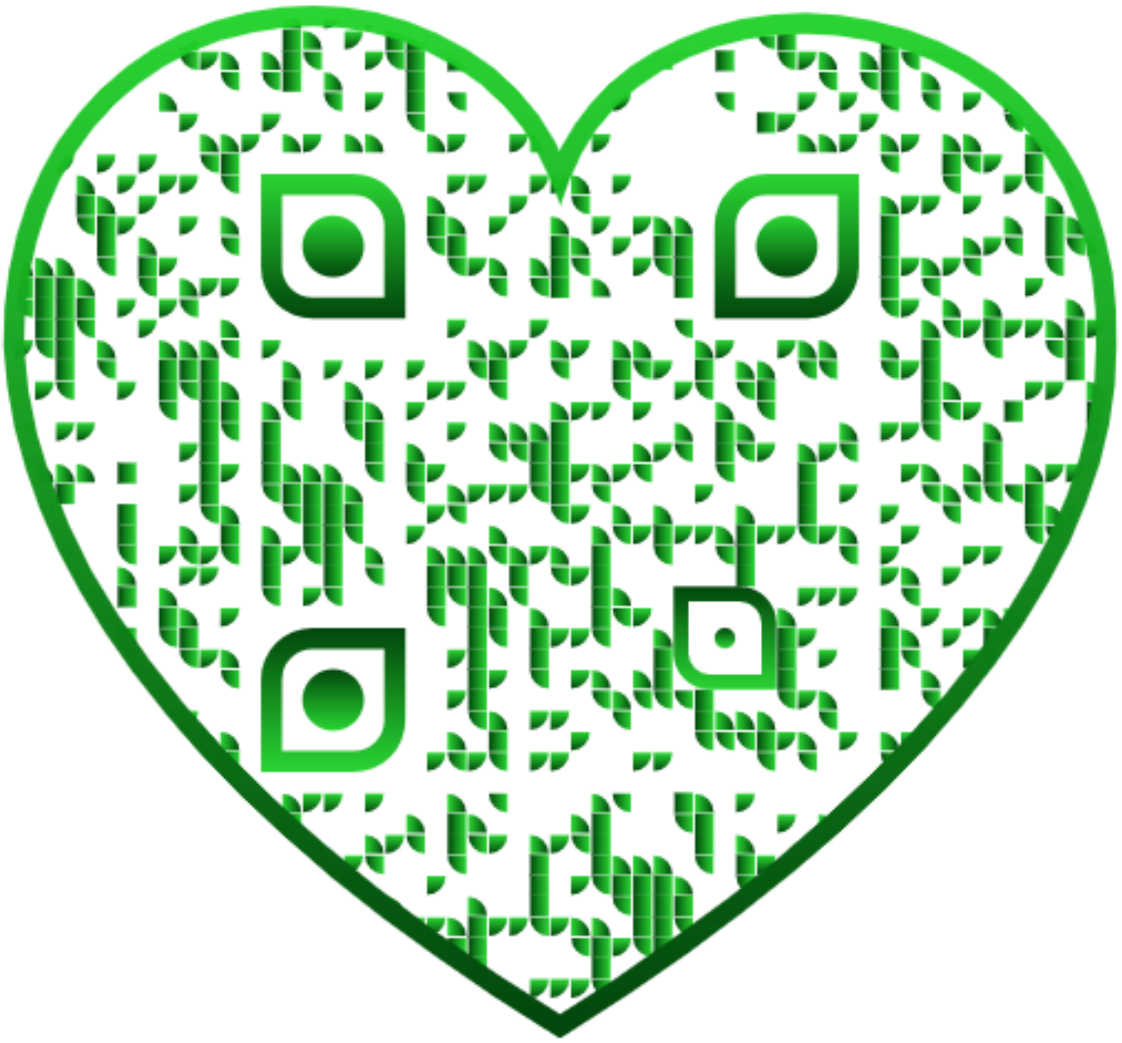
+

LINDSEY BUCKINGHAM
ON LIFE AFTER FLEETWOOD MAC

SCOTT MCKEON
ON PLAYING WITH CLAPTON

SUMMER NAMM RETURNS
THE BEST GEAR FROM NASHVILLE

NEW USA MODELS FROM EPIPHONE



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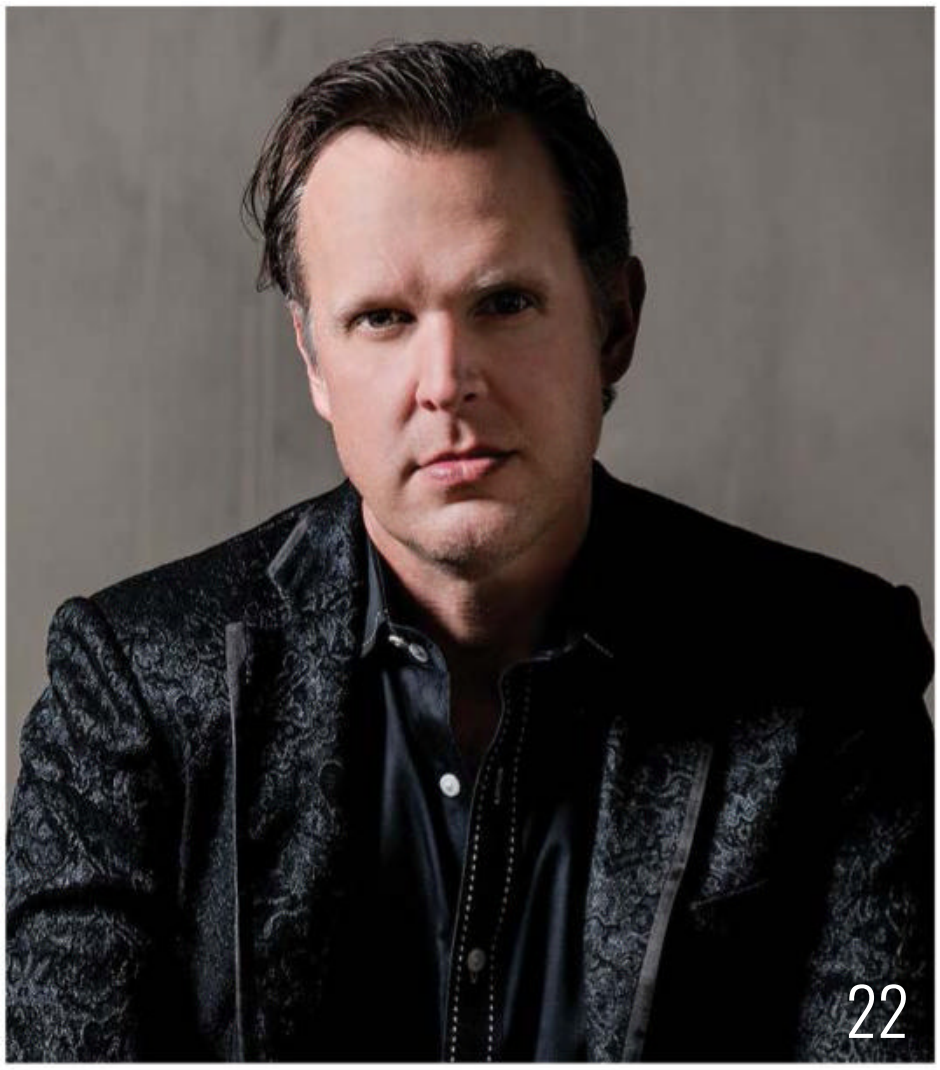
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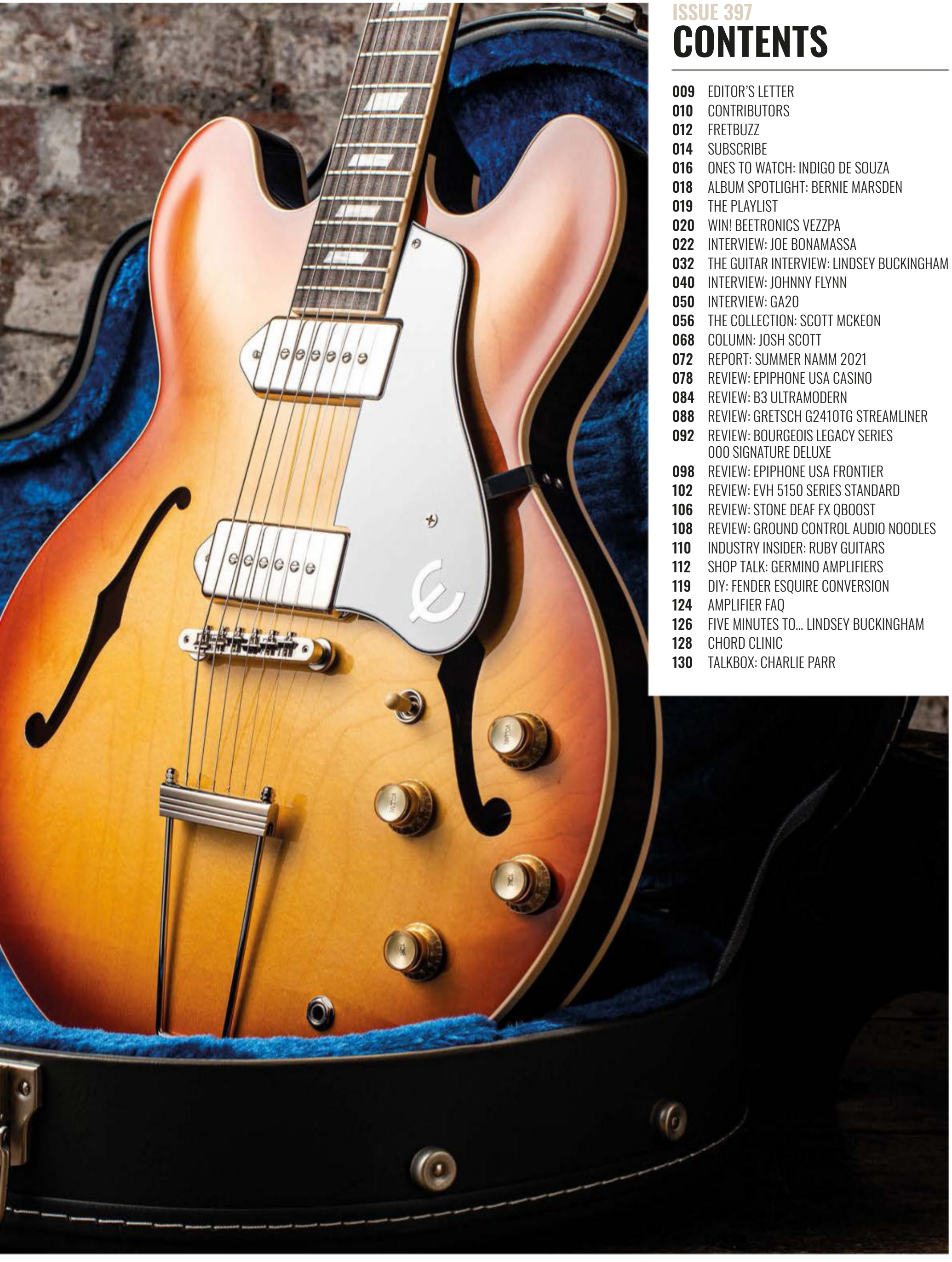

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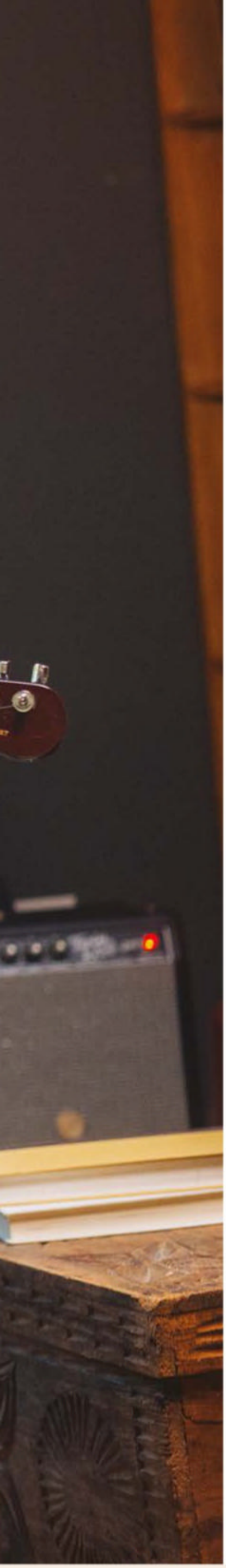

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EDITOR'S LETTER

LIKE RIDING A BIKE...

Welcome to the October issue of *Guitar Magazine*. This month, we're packed to the rafters with stars, from Fleetwood Mac icon Lindsey Buckingham to blues-boogie upstarts GA-20, rising garage-pop artist Indigo De Souza, British folk hero and actor Johnny Flynn and, of course, our coverstar Joe Bonamassa, with whom I caught up in Nashville during our trip across the pond for the Summer NAMM show.

In addition to all the best gear from Music City, which you can read about in our show report on p72, this issue also features the long-awaited return of the USA-made Epiphone Casino (was it worth the wait? Find out on p78) and a quite breathtaking Bourgeois 000 that'll bring your wallet out in a cold sweat. If all that somehow isn't sufficient to satisfy your craving for all things guitar, we also check out the 1962 Stratocaster that's been British blues-rocker Scott McKeon's number one instrument since he was 12 years old, and show you 10 different ways to play A minor. Learning a new shape or voicing is about the best songwriting springboard there is, so grab your guitar and turn to p128 now to give your chord vocabulary a shot in the arm.

As I type this, I'm about a week away from my first proper gig since February 2020. I've been involved in a couple of stripped-down performances but this set will be a full-band affair, taking place on a big outdoor stage at a local festival. With just one more rehearsal remaining, I'm still not entirely sure which guitar I'm using, what my pedalboard is going to look like, or how some of the parts go, so wish me luck! If you've played a gig recently, please write in and let us know how you got on – hopefully it was a joyous experience and you weren't as rusty as I'm going to be. Enjoy this month's mag and I'll see you next time.

Chris Vinnicombe
Chief Editor, Guitar.com & Guitar Magazine
chris@guitar.com

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Guitar CONTRIBUTORS

With live music events and trade shows starting to open their doors again, it feels like the world might just be inching its way back towards normality. Here, we quiz some of our contributors about the live events they are most looking forward to attending

TONY BACON

HARDBACK WRITER

Having realised long ago that he can write better than he can play, Tony has penned multiple books on the six-string. His latest is *Legendary Guitars* (Chartwell, 2020), and he chronicles one such instrument on p82: the Epiphone Casino. "If you need a reminder of how good a Casino can be," he says, "grab a slice of *And Your Bird Can Sing* by a Liverpool mob called The Beatles." Tony isn't so much worried about getting back to big expos… "I've almost forgotten what it's like to be in a small room with people playing live music. Bring it on."

HUW BAINES

RENEGADE OF PUNK

A freelance journalist who has written for *The Guardian*, *Vice* and others, Huw has also penned many a passable punk song on his mid-90s Telecaster. For this issue, Huw caught up with British folk singer and bona fide movie star Johnny Flynn. Flick to p40 to discover the punishing fitness regime that the guitarist must undergo before playing his National Trojan. As for Huw? "I can't wait for the first club show that feels like the old days," he says. "Total chaos and extreme volume, and space at the back for me to nod along like the old man that I am."

LEIGH FUGE

CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'

With more than 15 years of onstage and studio experience, Leigh has accumulated a wealth of guitar knowledge, as evidenced by his eponymous YouTube channel. This month, Leigh's ditched the pick in favour of fingerstyle to bring you a Lindsey Buckingham-inspired guitar lesson to complement our interview with the legendary guitarist. Get stuck in on p126. What's Leigh most looking forward to? Returning to the show floor. "The pandemic stopped my Winter NAMM trip this year so I'm excited to get out there in 2022!"

TOM PINNOCK

ROAD WARRIOR

Reviews editor for *Uncut*, Tom has been playing guitar since he picked up his mum's classical aged 11. Although these days he favours a Jazzmaster, he generally still fingerpicks. For this issue, he spoke to someone who does the same, the legendary Lindsey Buckingham. Head to p32 to hear about Buckingham's new material and why he's so excited to get back on the road with his trusty Rick Turner guitars. But what event is Tom most looking forward to? "I'm off to End Of The Road in Dorset soon, my favourite festival."

MATTHEW PYWELL

PSYCH MAJOR

Having grabbed bylines at *NME* and *Dazed* while also running his own music blog *Let It Happen*, Matthew clearly keeps his ear tight to the ground in the search for inspiring new acts. For this issue, he spoke to one in the shape of rising star Indigo De Souza. Flip to p16 to read about her "determination to lean towards a dirtier sound," says Matthew, when searching for that DIY vibe. What's he most looking forward to? "Manchester Psych Fest. I'm looking forward to seeing some ethereal bands in one of my favourite cities."

MICHAEL WATTS

TRAVEL AGENT

An award-winning guitarist and steel-string enthusiast, Michael has played a *lot* of acoustics in his time – Bourgeois among them. "I must have played more than 100 Bourgeois guitars over the years," he says, "and my extremely high expectations of the brand were blown out of the water by this Mad Rose 000!" Go to p92 to find out what he's talking about. Meanwhile, Watts can't wait to get moving. "I've missed travelling to see gigs. Some of my favourite memories were made in some corner of a foreign moshpit." Ours too, Mike. Ours too.

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FRETBUZZ

Your letters and observations on the world of guitar

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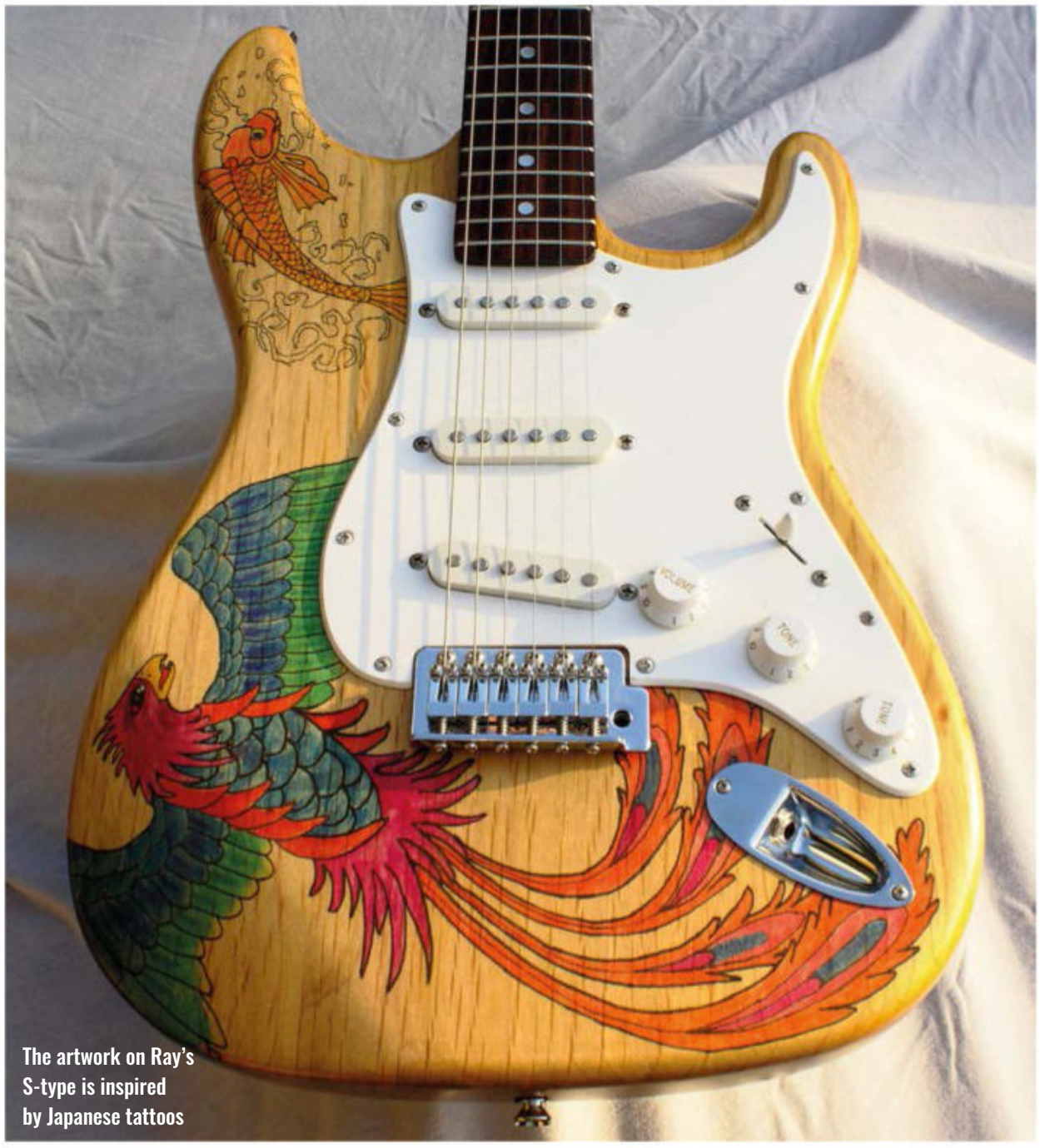

The artwork on Ray's S-type is inspired by Japanese tattoos

STAMP DUTY

Hi, all at *Guitar Magazine*! I really loved your article in the July 2021 edition, How To Buy A Vintage Strat. It was full of interesting detail. I'm lucky enough to own a 1964 refin Fender Strat which, other than the refinish, appears to be totally original – I *love* it! I bought it some years ago now from a well-known guitar auction house near Bath. The guitar is very dear to me as the neck date is just 20 days away from my own birth date of 25 Feb 1964 – when I saw that, I *had* to have it.

The reason I'm writing in is that I hoped you could answer a question about the pickups. At that time, Fender very helpfully stamped a date on the bottom of the spool piece, in this case, May '64. My question is: is it known when this practice started and stopped? I have seen other examples with the same yellow print stamp from this period but any information will be gratefully received – and please carry on doing exactly what you are doing.

On another note, my daughters are avid guitar players and lovers of music and whereas previously they would have a brief glance through the magazine, they are now reading it in much more detail, purely because of your much increased coverage of female artists. Thank you for that! In this household at least, it is so appreciated and so important. And a message from them: how about an interview with the Canadian musician Lights?

HOWARD STRACEY, VIA EMAIL

Thanks for your email, Howard. Diverse representation is important everywhere, including in guitar journalism. It's really encouraging to hear that our efforts to make Guitar.com and Guitar Magazine more reflective of the broad and varied bunch who love our instrument are helping to bring new readers into the fold – guitar is, after all, for everyone. Regarding your Strat-stamping question: Fender started stamping pickup flats with a yellow date stamp when the company switched from using black vulcanised fibreboard (aka Forbon) to grey in around March 1964. However, this changed to a handwritten date around 1966 and, by the late 1960s, Fender was using a black date stamp. Hopefully that satisfies your curiosity!

This Acoustasonic-style build was christened Django

WORKSHOP TALES

Hello. Having seen various lockdown builds featured in the mag over the past few months, I thought you might be interested in my latest creation. It's my version of the Fender Acoustasonic – which seems to be what everyone's doing at the moment – built for considerably less.

I first started building guitars about 10 or 12 years ago because I fancied a bass and figured that an electric guitar was only a plank of wood with a neck and strings. A decade on and now into my 70s, I fully appreciate how wrong that assumption was. But it's been so rewarding. My first build began as a partially deconstructed Ibanez bass, from which the original owner had removed the frets. After a lot of swearing in the shed, I had a fretless bass – and something much more: I was now hooked and have been building guitars ever since.

Over the years I've built an S-type with intricate art based on Japanese tattoo designs, which is my wife's favourite. Another highlight is the Flying V, which I bought as a bare body for £20 assuming it to be a knock-off, only to discover it was the real deal. I contacted Gibson and they sent me a copy of the original build sheet and I reconstructed it. And then of course there's my latest creation, Django, the acoustic-electric hybrid with the triangular soundhole. Each guitar tends to have something in it I haven't done before. Thanks for letting me share my building story and for the great magazine!

RAY DENGEL, VIA EMAIL

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ONES TO WATCH

INDIGO DE SOUZA

WORDS MATTHEW PYWELL

Having grown up in a creatively nurturing environment, Indigo De Souza released a debut album in 2018 in tribute to her upbringing. Now the US artist returns with an emotional follow-up

Indigo De Souza's 2018 debut album *I Love My Mom* was an ode to the one person who had always supported her and who encouraged the young Indigo to come out of her shell. De Souza's latest album is billed as a companion piece, a second chapter that aims to offer closure on this era of artistry.

The album's title, *Any Shape You Take*, is referential of Indigo's sound: mercurial and always contorting into new waves and tones. Her songs feel as if they're constantly transitioning into new landscapes. On them, her guitar becomes a mirror that reflects her emotional lyricism, with regular adrenaline-fuelled bursts of energy altering or accentuating the tone. This is an album of change, of highs and lows. It charts the artist's awkward journey of trying to figure things out and is at once intense, funny and upsetting, De Souza again showcasing the full range of her emotions.

For Indigo, songwriting is an opportunity to dive deep into feelings that she might otherwise find difficult to express. "I think it's a form of self-love and self-care," she says, "to actually fully engage with those feelings when I'm feeling them."

Tell us about the environment you grew up in.

"My mom is a very creative person and a wildly creative visual artist. I grew up around a lot of colourful feelings, and then also smack-dab in the centre of a town that was not colourful or creative at all. So, my mom was kind of like my window into the creative world, because there was not a lot of that around me otherwise. That's part of the reason why I wanted to name the [first] album *I Love My Mom*. It felt really appropriate because she inspired so much of my creativity."

“DISTORTION IS MY FAVOURITE EFFECT, FOR VOCALS AND FOR DRUMS AND FOR GUITAR – FOR EVERYTHING. I’M ALWAYS ASKING TO ADD MORE DISTORTION TO EVERYTHING”

When did you begin learning to write your own songs and music?
“I started as soon as I could play a few chords. I have some recordings from when I was really little, writing songs because my mom gave me a four-track tape recorder when I was young. I would write songs and record them onto that little thing. I still have a lot of those recordings that I’ve digitised. There’s one song in the recordings where I’m just thinking about how my mom is my whole world and I love her so much. I didn’t realise until way after I put out *I Love My Mom* that that song existed!”

Your dad’s a Brazilian bossa nova guitarist. What has his influence been on you as a player?
“He wasn’t really around for my life. He and my mom divorced when I was three, so his influences feel kind of distant but I think they’re still there. When I watch home videos and stuff, there are a lot of clips of him playing guitar for me when I was a baby. I’d like to think that somehow that seeped into my brain a little bit. I just think that we kind of share some sort of genetic drive to play music, which is really special.”

What artists have inspired you or made you think about playing the guitar in a different way?
“One of my first records was an Elliott Smith record. I think it was *Either/Or*. It was my first glimpse into the world of underground music. I didn’t know that underground music existed at all until I heard something like Elliott Smith. And then I was like, ‘Wait, this is something else – this is not like a very classic-structured song’. I eventually dove into a lot of underground people, like Sparklehorse, LVL UP and Bill Callahan, Sun Kil Moon. Really heavy artists that kind of brought me into a different layer of thinking.”

What are your go-to guitars at the moment?
“I have an SG with a lightning bolt, it’s so unique. It has like a humbucker and a single-coil and it just plays so smoothly. I go to that one because it’s the most fun to play. I also play my nylon-string acoustic a lot because I live in a church now and the main room is just a huge room – everything reverberates in there.”

Is there a piece of gear couldn’t you live without?
“If I had to choose one, it’d be distortion. It’s my favourite effect in general, for vocals and for drums and for guitar – for everything. I’m always asking to add more distortion to everything!”

Your music can’t really be pinned to a specific genre. How important is it to have a sense of fluidity in the music that you make?
“It’s really important. I’ve never wanted to make one kind of music, mostly because my personality has so many different facets. I like the ability to flow between genres freely. I just feel really lucky that I live in a world where I get to do that; I have so many different ways I would like to express myself musically, and it’s always changing based on how I’m feeling.”

What do you want people to take away from *Any Shape You Take*?
“My hope is that people feel seen when they’re hearing the album, because the album undergoes so many changes. I wanted it to feel really human and very aligned with the emotional spectrum of humans. I think a lot of the themes have to do with embracing change, and moving through change with compassion for yourself and just loving people for what they are.”

***Any Shape You Take* is out 27 August via Saddle Creek**

THE PLAYLIST

ALBUM SPOTLIGHT

BERNIE MARSDEN
KINGS

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

The legendary guitarist pays tribute to the Three Kings on his new album and takes the Beast along for the ride…

The first in a series of LPs that Bernie Marsden lovingly refers to as thank-you albums, *Kings* is the former Whitesnake man's first solo offering in more than seven years. It pays homage to songs composed or performed by Freddie, Albert, and BB King, and is a reminder of Marsden's exquisite lead playing and bandleading prowess.

Aiming to put his own stamp on the songs, he chose to work mainly in a live setting. "There's a lot of live lead guitar on here," says Bernie. "I wanted to keep the albums as live as possible, like the old days, before my time in the studio."

On the 12-track record, you'll find impressive renditions that not only pay tribute to the Three Kings' work but celebrate those who influenced them too, including Sonny Thompson and Don Nix. Elsewhere there are echoes of Marsden's peers, notable on the instrumental *Runaway*, which features nods to Beano-era Clapton and early Peter Green.

"We recorded the albums over two weekends," says Bernie. "With the guys I had, it was very easy. They understood what I was doing. The plan was clear in their heads."

Indeed, *Kings* is a well-crafted and considered paean to the greats, played by an equally revered musician. Here, Bernie selects his guitar highlights from the album.

KEY TO THE HIGHWAY

"This song was first recorded in the 1940s, I think, a travelling blues song. I always loved the feel of the Derek & The Dominos version on *Layla* [*And Other Assorted Love Songs*] and I always admired Freddie King's gritty version, so I based my recording on that one. I used a sunburst '59 Gibson ES-335 – Freddie recorded with a Goldtop. I wanted to play it the way he played it but also the way I've learnt it over the years and with what I've drawn from those guys. You can do all the string pulling on your own but you'll never quite sound like that because Freddie played with his finger and thumb, which was fantastic and mesmerising to watch in person."

I'LL PLAY THE BLUES FOR YOU

"I first heard Albert King play this on an import album. Albert had a different style, playing an upside down but normally strung guitar. With unique bends of the strings and a great vocal, this song was always going to be recorded. I used my PRS Signature Goldtop, the reason for that is because I sing in the middle, 'I'll play the blues for you on my gold guitar,' and I didn't use the old Goldtop because I don't think I took it to the studio that day. People say, 'Surely you want to use your old guitars all the way through?' But not really. It's nice to have a different feel and [PRS guitars] feel pretty old and used anyway because of the way they've been built and designed."

HELP THE POOR

"A somewhat obscure BB King song from the 60s, I deliberated recorded it because of the vocal. I'll always be a guitar player who sings and I also wanted a different version from Robben Ford's great version. I believe the guy that wrote it, Charles Singleton, wrote the lyrics for one of the biggest Sinatra songs, *Strangers In The Night*. I could never reproduce that BB King feel, so that's why the harmony guitars are there with that triad thing. I thought it sounded sweet and gave a nice Latin feel to the whole thing. Here I used another Gibson 335."

SAME OLD BLUES

"I have always loved this Don Nix song, first heard on Freddie King's *Gettin' Ready* album. Ironic lyrics because it definitely isn't the same old blues. I used the Beast here because everybody says, 'You're doing another record without using the bloody Beast!' I wanted to use it without overdriving it. That's just a '59 Les Paul into a small amp and played at a very low level. It just shows you how versatile those guitars are. It's almost a rediscovery of what they will do, other than the obvious. I'm not sure that the new ones will do that, because of the configuration. The Beast can do it all!"

RUNAWAY

"This is not so much a tribute album but a thank-you album, because it's the music that inspired me to play the way I do and wanted to play from day one. *Runaway* is a combination of nearly all those Freddie King, Sonny Thompson instrumentals that I learnt. There's a hope that people will recognise the sound: unbelievably, it's the same guitar that's on *Same Old Blues*, which shows you the difference. Amp-wise I used a Marshall Astoria combo and my little Gibson Ranger (see p124)."

Kings **is out now via Conquest Music**

PLAYLIST

On our new-look Playlist page, the *Guitar* editorial team reveal the essential tracks that they have on repeat right now

THE WAR ON DRUGS

Living Proof

Adam Granduciel's much-anticipated return comes with introspection rather than a fanfare but softly strummed acoustic guitars, memorable piano lines and atmospheric keyboards frame this Dylanesque slow-burner quite beautifully. Rather than accelerating into the sunset in The War On Drugs' default style, when the rhythm section arrives in earnest, the half-time feel only adds weight to the heartbreak. Four minutes in, Granduciel's expressive, searching lead guitar makes a brief cameo appearance and then it's all over. Wonderful and desolate in equal measure, *Living Proof* seems tailor-made for the end credits of a movie.

Chris Vinnicombe

JADE BIRD

Open Up The Heavens

Following the success of her 2019 debut album, Jade Bird decided to decamp to Dave Cobb's RCA Studio A in Nashville to make her sophomore album *A Different Kind Of Light*. It was clearly a great decision, as the change of scenery has seen the 23-year-old British indie-folk upstart take a stylistic turn towards embracing the more distorted charms of Blur, Fleetwood Mac, The Stone Roses and PJ Harvey. The Sheryl Crow-esque *Open Up The Heavens* is a perfect summation of her evolution as an artist since that first LP – a catchy, driving acoustic rocker brimming with righteous indignation. "I can spit venom," she says of the song. "And I need to, for my own sanity."

Josh Gardner

DRY CLEANING

Tony Speaks!

Released as a bonus track on the Japanese version of debut album *New Long Leg* and subsequently as a cassette for Record Store Day 2021, this single reveals another edge to the post-punk act. The introductory bass riff sounds like John Paul Jones channelling Warsaw-era Joy Division or maybe Magazine, and is quickly followed up by Tom Dowse's woozy guitar, which scythes its way through the song with impeccable style and direction. It's augmented further during the outro too, with intensifying arpeggios and the brutal assault of a wah pedal. Offering contrast to the album's more studious approach, *Tony Speaks!* is monstrous. This should cement Dry Cleaning as Britain's best new band.

Sam Roberts

PANOPTICON

The Embers At Dawn

Black metal's bleakness, fondness for forests and focus on one-person acts pair particularly well with the rich traditions of Americana, even if few artists realise it. Panopticon certainly does, with the folk instrumentation of *The Embers At Dawn* only adding to the impact of the blast beats and thunderous riffs. The track's acoustic, slide-peppered opening gradually blooms into a wall of intense distortion, before it finally fades back down to earthen field recordings of footsteps crunching across leaves. The atmosphere really is like nothing else – it's enough to make you feel a chilling whistle of wind through trees even in the midst of a London heatwave.

Cillian Breathnach

EMMA-JEAN THACKRAY

Say Something

Yearning for Yorkshire's bold-as-brass traditions to collide with cosmic funk, widescreen jazz and intensely detailed dancefloor anthems? Neither was I until I heard Emma-Jean Thackray. She plays practically every instrument on her debut album *Yellow*, with standout single *Say Something* featuring free-form solos that sound more like synth than guitar. Even more impressive is that the six-string in question is a cheap Strat copy copped from Argos and given to her by her parents when she was 14 – proof that you don't need top-tier gear to produce an album of the year. Stay tuned to *Guitar.com* for more on said Strat and Thackray in the near future.

Sean McGeady

QUICKSAND

Missile Command

Quicksand's 1993 debut, *Slip*, was arguably one of the finest alternative records of the 90s. Initially splitting in 1995, their fusion of crushing post-hardcore riffs with a sharp, intelligent sense of melody left an indelible mark on the landscape of heavy music still visible today (Deftones, I'm looking at you). *Distant Populations* is the New York quartet's follow-up to 2017's *Interiors* (the band's first new material in 22 years). Has time seen them mellow? Not at all. *Missile Command*, the album's midway point, is all churning, palm-muted downstrokes, discordant bends and syncopated rhythms until masterfully released into a blistering wall of sound – indisputable, classic Quicksand.

Phil Millard

WIN A BEETRONICS VEZZPA WORTH £215

This small but fierce pedal from boutique brand Beetronics offers two unique voices in a typically beautiful box. Enter for your chance to win

The new Vezzpa Octave Stinger from Beetronics promises a range of aggressive and spitty fuzz tones, as well as an upper octave. Built around op amp circuitry, this scaled-down stompbox from the brand's Babee Series – about a quarter of the size of its flagship Royal Jelly pedal – features two modes: Fuzzzz promises a powerchord-friendly wall of pollen-laden fur, while Stinger mode unleashes a high-octave voicing.

The Vezzpa cleverly features just one multi-function footswitch. A single tap turns the pedal on and off, while in bypass mode it functions in momentary mode, operating like a killswitch. You can toggle between sounds with a double-click and, with the pedal engaged, holding down the switch gives you a blast of the unit's other voice until you lift your foot off. There are also three colour-coded LEDs to guide you.

To enter, simply head over to *Guitar.com* and answer the following question. Good luck!

Which of these is NOT a current Beetronics pedal?
A) Swarm
B) Bee's Wing
C) Royal Jelly

Enter at guitar.com/competitions

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By entering this competition, you agree to the following terms and conditions:

The closing date is **23:59 GMT, 27 September 2021**. The Company's decision is final. This competition is open to the United Kingdom residents only. This competition is open to 18 years old and above only. For full terms and conditions, please go to **bnd.la/gm-ctos**.

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BOSS

MOVING THE NEEDLE

Armed with an epic new album, Joe Bonamassa is ready to hit the road. We catch up with the hardest working guitarist in the business to discuss recording over Zoom, stripping down your rig and how he's become the Derek Smalls of Covid-era touring

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE **PORTRAITS** ELEANOR JANE

Joe Bonamassa is in high spirits and, frankly, who can blame him? We sit down with the guitarist in the slightly spooky surroundings of a Nashville paint factory that's been repurposed as a film and photography studio and provides the suitably vibey location for today's shoot. The July air is as thick as tar and, though the industrial-sized fan we've cranked up to jet-engine levels provides precious little respite from the heat, Joe's taking it in his stride. After all, he bought an apartment downtown back in 2018 and these days he's practically a Music City native. Yet, with summer and fall US tour dates in the calendar and a new album to promote, staying at home is the last thing on Bonamassa's mind.

Entitled *Time Clocks*, the album in question is his 15th solo studio long-player and one of his most ambitious to date. If the six and seven-minute durations of many of the songs don't provide enough of a signpost that this might be a more progessive-sounding take on blues-rock than Bonamassa's previous work, then how about the sleeve art? Designed by none other than Hugh Syme, the Canadian graphic artist responsible for creating album cover artwork for the likes of Rush, Dream Theater, Megadeth and Queensrÿche, *Time Clocks* features a giant hourglass shattering in a desolate landscape as several tiny figures look on. That's the awkward thing about time: it's bigger than all of us, and there's very little we can do about it.

Recorded in early 2021 in New York City's Germano Studios, *Time Clocks* was cut as a trio with Steve Mackey on bass and Anton Fig on drums, with backing vocals and additional instrumentation added later. Due to travel restrictions, Bonamassa's longtime producer Kevin Shirley was only able to attend the sessions via a Zoom video link from Australia.

"We were able to upload the tracks in realtime to Kevin with a one-second latency," says Joe. "He would get to the studio at two o'clock in the morning and he was already a day ahead of us. First of all I was like, 'This shit isn't gonna work'. But it did actually work surprisingly well. Given the choice, I wouldn't do it like that but if you have to, you can.

"If we'd done it last year, it would have been more difficult than it was," he adds. "Everybody was tested, they took your temperature every day when you walked in and it worked out fine. I will say this: it was a little strange sitting and recording that way with masks on, then masks off – you can't exactly sing with a mask! So it was interesting from that perspective."

circle
COUNTRY PLAYS HERE.

"I LIKE THE CONVERSATION IN A BAND CONTEXT WHEN EVERYBODY'S PLAYING. I CANNOT PLAY TO BACKING TRACKS. I HAVE A HARD TIME OVERDUBBING SOLOS"

Though the album was recorded as a three-piece and in fragmented circumstances, the end product is a much bigger-sounding proposition. "It ended up turning into one of these more adventurous things," says Joe. "There's a lot on there! But the people who played on it have been playing with me for years. Historically, we've always done background vocals after the fact. Horns would always go on after, strings would go on after. So we've kinda been working like this for a while. The weirdest thing was not having Kevin Shirley in the room producing it. And us looking at a screen? It was really the ultimate two-dimensional approach. I guess it's a way of doing it but I'm old-fashioned. I've become really weary of 2D."

VIRTUAL WORLD

September 2020 saw Bonamassa stream a live pay-per-view performance from Nashville's iconic Ryman Auditorium with a percentage of the proceeds going towards his Fueling Musicians programme, an initiative designed to support musicians struggling to make ends meet due to the impact of the pandemic. Admirable as that was, Joe is clearly itching to get back in front of physical crowds.

"Over the last year, everything has been a virtual event," he says. "It's not bad. It's just not the way I like to consume things. The whole thing about a live gig is, it's kinetic. You feel this movement of air. No matter how good your stereo system is, a livestream ain't gonna be that. It may actually be mixed better than a live gig. But as a way of consuming media, at first I thought, 'Oh, this is kind of interesting'. Then after about six months, I was so bored of being part of it and watching it!"

With touring off the table for most of the past 18 months, many musicians have immersed themselves in their instrument by practising, writing and recording at home. For Joe, things were different. "I think the prevailing narrative is that everybody was just sitting at home woodshedding, writing the greatest album of all time and getting ready to unleash it onto a very hungry world," he says. "And some people did. But most of us old-timers – and I can say old-timer because I get called a boomer on a regular basis – most of us didn't play anything."

When 30 years of relentless touring is put on pause, the resulting shock to the system inevitably triggers some big questions. "It was like, 'Okay, what are you? Am I a guitar player? No. Am I singer? No. Songwriter? No. I'm an *entertainer*.' The three things I just described feed into the one thing I think I'm good at, which is entertaining. And by entertaining that means in a room, with people, reading a room and a crowd. That was my takeaway from a year of being stuck in a house full of guitars. If I didn't have a reason to play, I wouldn't play. I wasn't just playing because I wanted to learn this or learn that. A lot of people did. I probably got worse in the last year!

"Some artists really enjoy it but I can't wait to get out of the studio – that's just the kind of nomadic life I've led. But there's no right or wrong in anything, people have a process. Some people hate the touring and this was their dream, to stay at home and be creative in the studio. I was just looking at piles of guitars and gear and thinking, 'I have no desire to play any of this today'. I'll take pictures of it, because if nothing else I'm trying to be an Instagram influencer!"

CITY LIGHTS

When Bonamassa was able to get back to business and begin work on a new album, he discovered that the location of Germano Studios in Manhattan's NoHo district presented logistical problems. However, he soon embraced the limitations of a smaller-than-usual array of guitars and amplifiers.

"Shipping large amounts of heavy road cases to Broadway that would have to be unloaded on the street, in the middle of winter, didn't seem appealing to me," he admits. "I went with the two Deluxes approach. I had a Deluxe Reverb, I had a brown Deluxe and I ended up having one of my signature Twins from our inventory shipped to New York City. I had a '59 Les Paul, I had a Blackguard Tele, maple and rosewood-neck Strats and a B-Bender Tele. I had enough to get in trouble! But, long story short, compared to years ago with 40, 50 guitars, tonnes of amps set up, my live rig… there was none of that. And, to be honest with you, once I got my head around that, it was easy. I actually liked it better. It was like, 'You want more overdrive? Turn the amp up. You want less overdrive? Turn the amp down. I think it's too bright. Okay, we're gonna move the mic.' If you go with what you've got, you'll get there in the end. You'll figure out a way to twist the dials and EQ it. Unfortunately it still sounds like yourself!"

Have Joe's stints in the producer's chair on records by the likes of Chicago-based blues player Joanna Connor and legendary keyboardist Reese Wynans informed his process when it comes to recording guitar parts for his own material? "Yeah," he confirms. "But I also have to practise what I preach! I told Joanna Connor, 'We're using one amp'. And she had her overdrive and chorus and I was like, 'We're not using any of that'. And she excelled in that environment. And I was like, 'I have to practise that myself'. I can't use the crutches and then tell someone else they can't.

"But, being a rhythm guitar player on a record you are producing, I'm in the control room, I'm listening to everything. You learn from the Steve Lukathers, the Brent Masons, all the great people that have made a life in the studio. When they are asked to be themselves, they become themselves, and when they are asked to come up with the right parts for the song, it might not sound like Brent Mason, but it sounds right for the song. You don't ever wanna be that person that walks in and goes, 'This is my tone'. If you're gonna be a session player, identify where you're at and bring the toolkit that's right."

"I CAN PLAY A FENDER AMP AND A FENDER GUITAR, IT SOUNDS LIKE ME. I CAN PLAY A GIBSON AMP AND A GIBSON GUITAR. IT SOUNDS LIKE ME. MOVING THE NEEDLE ISN'T HAPPENING ANYMORE"

BACK IN THE SADDLE

With more than 40 North American shows booked for the second half of 2021 alone, we wonder whether Bonamassa's enthusiasm to return to live work is tempered by the myriad complexities of touring during the Covid era.

"You can't get a tourbus now," he says. "There's a thousand acts out. Some people are taking this thing to an absolute extreme, testing everybody going in and spending a fortune on that, and that's their right to do. And some people are just throwing caution to the wind. I think we're somewhere in the middle. We're the lukewarm water! We're the Derek Smalls of Covid touring. At the end of the day, you've gotta make sure what you are doing is responsible. It's all about personal choice and whatever the audience is comfortable with. If you read the loud criticism on social media, you'd think this is mandatory and that we're rounding people up and shoving 'em in the Ryman against their will. Wait a minute! We're not doing that!"

We suggest that a return to the road might see a resumption of the guitar safaris that have become a fixture of Bonamassa's Instagram account but, he claims, he's way past that. "I ticked a few boxes this year, stuff that never came my way that I was able to find really nice examples of," he says. "But the collecting thing was mostly because I was out and touring and hunting this stuff down. When you are just kinda sitting around, you're not hunting it down, you're not getting leads, and at some point you just don't care. I'm out of room and nothing's really moving the needle.

"A couple of months ago I rediscovered my love of SGs. I've got like 30 SGs and I never play 'em. But I got out this '63 that I've had forever and was like, 'This sounds great! Where's this been?' It's been this constant cycle of discovery and rediscovery. We're at the point where you play what you've got. I can dig something out of the vault and you're like, 'Holy shit, here's a real Bluesbreaker combo, here's a real '59 Les Paul'. But, blindfolded, you're gonna go, 'It sounds like Joe wanking away again'. Unfortunately, as I get older, nothing moves the needle. Nothing. I can play a Fender amp and a Fender guitar, it sounds like me. I can play a Gibson amp and a Gibson guitar. It sounds like me. Moving the needle isn't happening anymore."

Something that Joe has been turning to again is his Dumble rig – a setup that works equally well for power-trio gigs, playing to hundreds of thousands of people while sitting in with Brad Paisley at Nashville's outdoor 4th July spectacular, or even a performance at the Grand Ole Opry.

"I know it appears that I Instagram them more than I use them, but I do use them," insists Joe. "With the master volume I'm able to get the kind of overdrive I like and it sounds great. People say Dumbles are so overrated – yeah, if you're expecting an amp of that price to magically make you sound like Robben Ford or Larry Carlton, then yes, they are extremely overrated, because Robben and Larry can plug into whatever and sound like Robben and Larry.

"I think it's the same for every guitar player when they've put in multiple sets of 10,000 hours.

Although this Goldtop is a relatively recent acquisition, Joe has indulged in far fewer guitar safaris of late

What happens is that you start to form a sound that manifests itself through anything that you play through. Listen to Tommy Emmanuel – you can give him anything! You can give him a Yamaha that costs $150 or a 000-45 but it doesn't matter. The tactility of his playing is going to dictate what it sounds like. And I think that happens to a lot of folks as they get into their 40s and they've done this their whole lives."

NEW GENERATION

At the other end of the scale, the pandemic appears to have birthed a new breed of guitar players and provided a huge shot in the arm to the guitar manufacturing industry. Old-fashioned he may claim to be but Bonamassa is unequivocal in his support for the next generation of guitar stars.

"When people started proclaiming that the guitar is dead, for a while I was like, maybe it is," he admits. "Then all of a sudden, out of the blue, you start seeing a huge swathe of players that are exceptionally gifted and exceptionally advanced for their age. And that was starting pre-Covid. I think that one of the few good things about the internet is that it has unleashed a generation of guitar players that may not have experienced a lot of live stage time but are incredibly gifted musicians who have gotten a lot of notoriety through the use of social media platforms. It's their stage.

"It's an interesting phenomenon for someone like me. I like the rugby scrum, I like no safety net and I like the conversation in a band context when everybody's playing. I cannot play to backing tracks – I have a hard time overdubbing solos on my own records because I'm not in the moment. That's a foreign concept to me. I do it, but I know my best solos on record have always been cut in the room, in the moment. But I come from an older way of looking at things.

"Any way someone can get into guitar and make a living from it, influence others and do something positive in a musical sense? More power to you. It's why everybody does it in the first place. It can't be the same old thing over and over again because then it becomes boring."

Time Clocks is out 29 October via Provogue/Mascot Label Group. Visit jbonamassa.com for upcoming tour dates

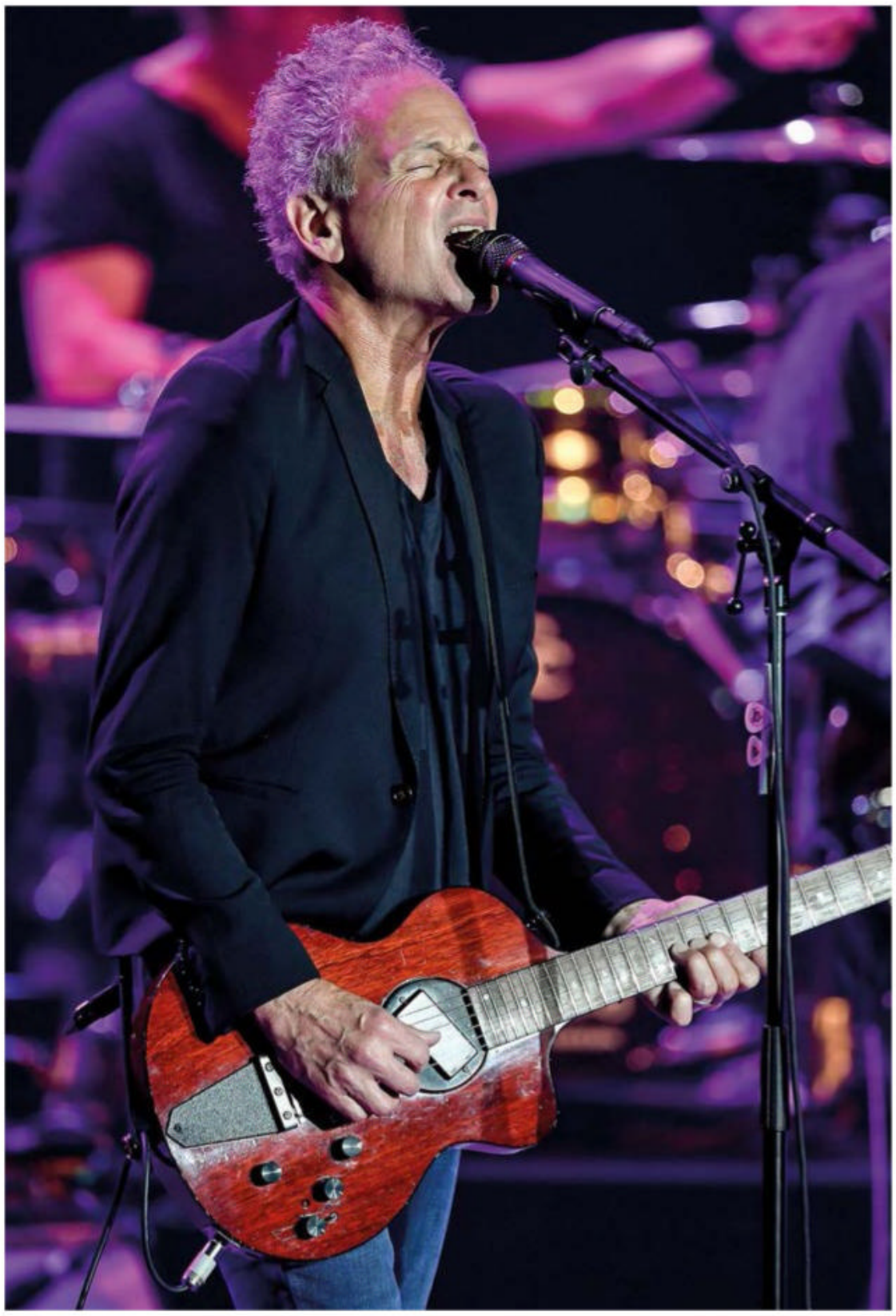
"ANY WAY SOMEONE CAN GET INTO GUITAR AND MAKE A LIVING FROM IT, INFLUENCE OTHERS AND DO SOMETHING POSITIVE IN A MUSICAL SENSE? MORE POWER TO YOU"

LINDSEY BUCKINGHAM

THE Guitar INTERVIEW

The former Fleetwood Mac man was turfed out of the legendarily fractious band in 2018, in circumstances he calls "absurd". Now free to focus on his solo career, the 71-year-old has crafted his first album in more than a decade, with the help of his home studio and a beloved Strat he had to put to one side years ago. Here, we talk to Buckingham about guitars, why he hasn't seen his '59 Les Paul in years and what it really felt like to step into Peter Green's shoes

WORDS TOM PINNOCK
PORTRAITS LAUREN DUKOFF



Somewhere deep within in Los Angeles, there's a warehouse – probably climate-controlled, certainly high-security – that houses some of Lindsey Buckingham's rarer guitars. There's little point asking Buckingham himself what's in there though. He doesn't know.

"Oh, good question," he says, on the phone from his home in California. "I don't know. I don't have a collection for the sake of a collection – it's just something that I ended up with for some reason. I think probably the most valuable guitar I have there is a '59 Les Paul. I haven't even seen it for years. But I know it's there!"

It turns out that Buckingham's stash also includes a rare Alembic 12-string, a 1960s Gibson J-200 and an Epiphone Airscreamer, built to resemble an Airstream trailer, according to his long-time tech Stanley Lamendola. Yet the guitarist's ambivalence towards these many in-storage treasures isn't the jaded response of a man who can afford anything. Rather, Lindsey Buckingham has always been a guitarist happy with a sparse set of tools – and one who makes his magic with technique more so than gear.

"It's not what you got, it's what you do with what you got," he says. "I guess I'm getting all this stuff done in my own way. It's about limitations. Well, that's what I try to tell myself!"

In a similar fashion, Buckingham's new self-titled solo album, his first for a decade, was recorded in his modest home studio on a Sony 48-track tape recorder. Close to hand was his trusty '62 Fender Stratocaster, DI'd straight into the reel-to-reel, and a Martin D-18.

Though he has the chops, Buckingham is much more interested in serving the song than showing off. "You do hear some players who just tend to play on top of a song and not inside it," he says. "Then there are people like Chet Atkins, people who play parts that make the records what they are but sometimes you don't even notice the parts. That's what I would gravitate to, you know, over just, 'Listen to me play.'"

RECORD PLAYER

Lindsey Buckingham has always been more fascinated by songs and records than by guitar style. Growing up in the Bay Area, he was blown away by the first flush of rock 'n' roll, courtesy of his older brother Jeff's expanding record collection.

"Without him, I probably wouldn't be doing what I'm doing," says Buckingham. "I was only six when Elvis Presley came on the scene with *Heartbreak Hotel*. It's hard to even characterise how impactful that was. At six years old, I wasn't in any position to be buying hundreds of 45s. But my brother, who was seven years older, came home one day and said, 'Hey, there's this new singer out there named Elvis Presley and he's really cool'. The deep meaning of rock 'n' roll was suddenly that young people had their own music, so to hear this guy singing, and to see what it looked like, it was just mind-blowing."

Having only heard his parents' music – the *South Pacific* soundtrack and the *Nutcracker Suite* were two regularly spun records at home – this new style was a revelation for the young Lindsey. Later came Jerry Lee Lewis, Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Johnny Cash and more, as well as a chord book that allowed Buckingham to work out their music, which he spent hours doing in brother Jeff's room with his singles and turntable.

"I wasn't looking at Elvis like, 'I wanna be that,'" says the guitarist. "It wasn't the iconic James Dean look that was drawing me. It was more just the overall presence of what it seemed to represent: the freedom, the possibility, the freshness. He was such a role model, with his Martin guitar – the whole package was just so incredible."

While he's learnt to appreciate Scotty Moore's picking and "orchestral technique", Presley's lead guitarist passed Buckingham by at the time. He took more notice of fingerstyle playing when he got into the folk music of The Kingston Trio, as well as jazz guitarists such as Charlie Byrd.

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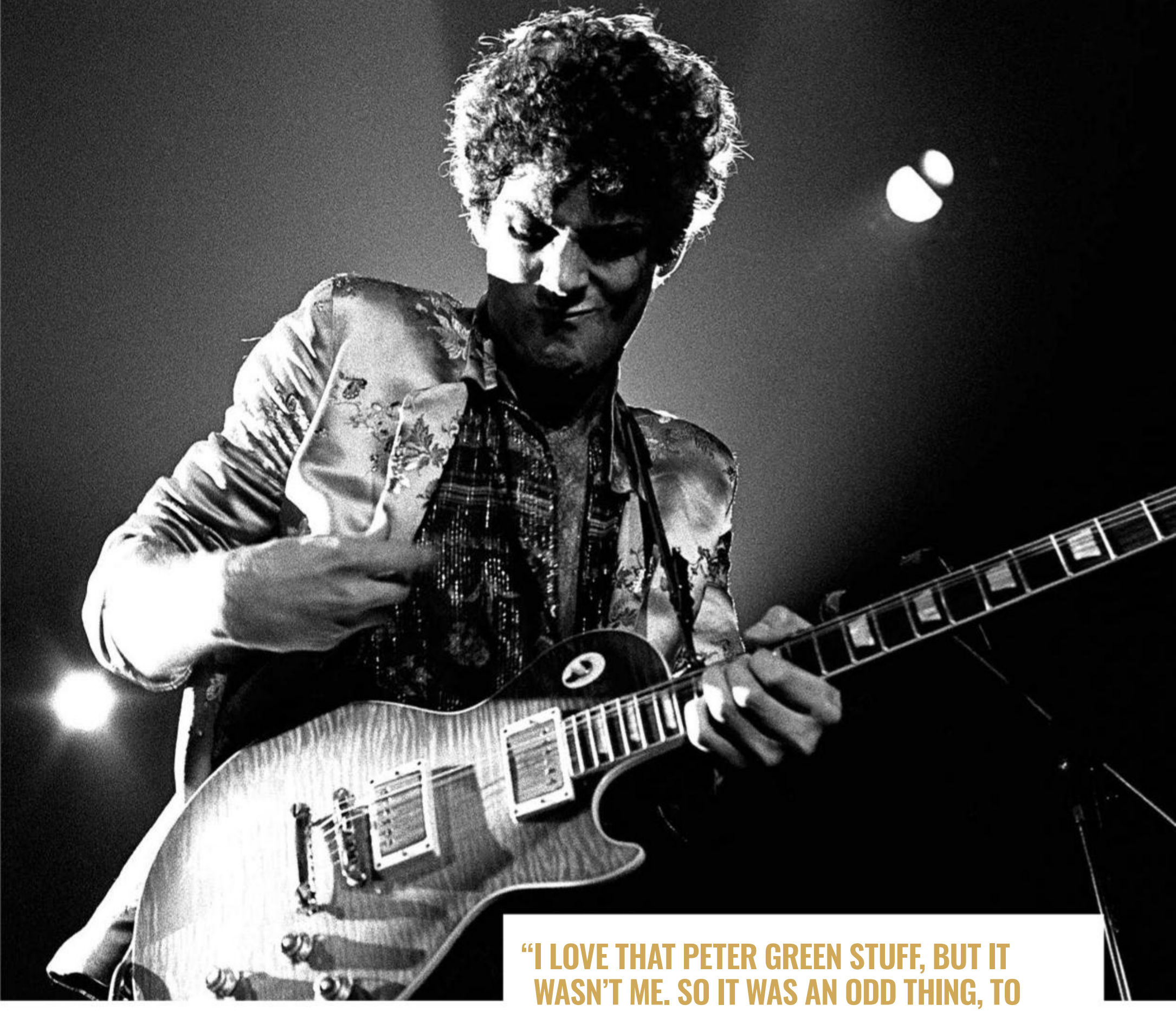

“I LOVE THAT PETER GREEN STUFF, BUT IT WASN’T ME. SO IT WAS AN ODD THING, TO GO AND BE THE PLAYER OF THOSE SONGS”

“There was something identical that was drawn from for both of those styles. Some of those people were playing in a light jazz, sort of classical style, and I was trying to learn some of those things which inherently needed to be played with all the fingers. Even more fundamental was when that first wave of rock ’n’ roll started to fall away in the very early 60s, and folk music became really, really popular. Folk music was all about the Travis pick or even banjo picking, and folk became a really big influence in my life – groups like The Kingston Trio; Peter, Paul and Mary; maybe Ian & Sylvia. This all pre-dated Bob Dylan. He came in very near the end.”

RIGHT HAND MAN

That melting pot of fingerstyle influences led Buckingham to develop his unique right-hand method; more of a percussive hammer than picking hand, says Lamendola.

“I was playing banjo too by that point,” says Buckingham. “It was just part of my style. Of course, I use a pick in the studio sometimes to get a nice clean sound for a strum but that style is part and parcel with someone who teaches themselves to play and doesn’t feel there are any rules they have to adhere to.”

In the 60s, Buckingham’s most high-profile gig was as bassist in the band Fritz. By the early 70s, he and the group’s vocalist, Stevie Nicks, had set out on their own path as duo (and couple) Buckingham Nicks. For this move, the guitarist needed to hone his songwriting – which he did with a reel-to-reel in a storeroom at his father’s coffee plant south of San Francisco – and develop his style on electric.

“I wasn’t really a lead guitar player,” he says. “So in the process of retooling myself for Buckingham Nicks as the guitarist, I was listening to Jimmy Page a lot. He had great chops but also amazing production values – and that became the key: listening for the use of guitar in ways that were integral. I can’t think of anyone who even touches Jimmy Page in terms of being able to draw from elements of folk and classical and other things and make it so musical.”

Buckingham’s new Fender Stratocaster became his go-to, as it gave him impact and brightness even while using his fingers. But he also used a Gibson Les Paul on the duo’s self-titled and sole album, released in 1973 and still one of rock’s great out-of-print records.

ABOVE Lindsey Buckingham playing Les Paul in place of his Strat at the Omni Coliseum in Atlanta, Georgia in 1977, Fleetwood Mac’s *Rumours* era

OPPOSITE Buckingham playing in support of *Solo Anthology: The Best of Lindsey Buckingham* at San Francisco’s Palace of Fine Arts Theatre in 2018

"The Strat gave back a lot for someone who wasn't using a pick and therefore was looking for a certain amount of bite naturally in the sound of the guitar. As far as a reissue goes, 10 years ago there was some optimism that Stevie would wanna play ball but she apparently didn't. You never know."

BIG SHOES

After Mick Fleetwood heard Buckingham Nicks' epic closer *Frozen Love* by chance in LA's Sound City studio, he took the duo on as new members in Fleetwood Mac at the end of 1974. Never lacking in confidence, Buckingham didn't find joining the band and stepping into a role once occupied by the likes of Peter Green and Danny Kirwan particularly daunting.

"I had and have great respect for Peter and Danny but I never had the sense of, 'Oh, I'm in the shadow of Peter Green' or 'I'm in the shadow of Danny Kirwan'. They hadn't been around for a while and there'd been so many other incarnations of Fleetwood Mac. There was a sense that they were in the rear-view mirror, while the band kept coming up with album after album that were kind of non sequiturs, with different line-ups all the time. That was just Mick's way of keeping the band together and intuitively knowing there was something important at the end of the rainbow, which, obviously, there was."

Joining Fleetwood Mac wasn't without its challenges. With little material of their own, the new line-up still had to please fans by playing older Mac songs, such as *Oh Well, The Green Manalishi (With the Two Prong Crown)* and *Rattlesnake Shake*, along with a couple of Buckingham Nicks tunes.

"I love that Peter Green stuff," he admits. "But it wasn't me. So it was an odd thing for quite a while, to go up there and be the mouthpiece, be the player, of a group of songs that I had nothing to do with. Suddenly it did feel like I was in a cover band, and that lasted for years because it took a long time for us to have enough material of our own to fill a set. It was something I came to think of as dues that I needed to pay as the new kid."

POINTING THE FINGER

Buckingham's sound and gear choices were also questioned by the group, with Mick Fleetwood even asking the guitarist to stop playing with his fingers, a request that Buckingham ignored. A change from the Stratocaster was deemed necessary, though, to better meld with the band's darker textures.

"They had a pre-existing sound," he explains, "and the Stratocaster did not fit into that, so I had to start using a Les Paul. But being really full, it was not nearly as percussive or clean as the Strat had been, and it wasn't as well suited for fingerstyle."

Rick Turner found a solution. The luthier and co-founder of Alembic had previously fitted an Alembic Stratoblaster pickup into Buckingham's Strat during the making of 1977's *Rumours* album.

"MY RICK TURNER GUITARS HAVE BECOME SUCH A PART OF THE STAGE. I CAN'T IMAGINE HAVING BEEN AS EFFECTIVE WITHOUT THEM"

Two years later, he designed the Turner Model 1 especially for Buckingham. The guitar boasted that full-bodied Les Paul tone but with a more percussive and cleaner sound reminiscent of a Strat, as well as the possibility of more acoustic-like voices. It's been the guitarist's main onstage electric ever since. He currently owns eight, with another on order from Turner, plus a similar number of acoustic Renaissance guitars, some baritone, also made by the luthier.

The Model 1's construction was, says Buckingham, a simple process – as far as he was concerned anyway. "Did I have to go back and forth with Rick?" he says. "No, not at all. I just showed up one day and that was it. It was like, 'Wow'. I don't know how Rick managed to work that middle ground for me but he understood how to translate that into what I needed technically."

The Model 1 isn't your standard electric. One of its features is that you can rotate the pickup to get a unique sound. Buckingham and his tech found the place they like it – "closer to the bridge on the low strings and closer to the neck on the upper strings" – and keep it there on all their guitars.

In the studio, Buckingham doesn't use his Model 1 guitars often. On stage, however, they're essential to his performances: "They are so across-the-board useful onstage." He runs them through vintage Mesa/Boogie Dual Rectifiers, custom-made 2x12s with EV12L speakers, and sticks to the same two pedals, a Boss DD-3 delay and Boss OD-1 overdrive.

ABOVE Buckingham performing with a Model 1 on Fleetwood Mac's 2009 'Unleashed' tour at London's Wembley Arena

OPPOSITE The Rick Turner Renaissance has been an invaluable acoustic guitar for Buckingham over the years

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18+

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"I always need to have both of those," he says. "Certainly you can't play a lead without fuzz. I've tried other things that were interesting but not necessary, so I just kept to what I had. After a while, you become a creature of habit. Maybe it would have been different if the format in Fleetwood Mac had been a little different – you know, if it was as open as, say, what The Edge has, the space around his guitar playing. He's got a lot more volume to fill and perhaps freedom because of that, whereas there's always going to be an element of needing to fit into something that is somewhat confining in Fleetwood Mac."

GOING ALONE

Any discussion of Fleetwood Mac is delving into the past, of course: Buckingham is now a full-time solo artist after being ousted from the band in 2018, seemingly for requesting a few months' delay to a suggested tour. "It was absurd, after all the troubles we'd been through," he marvels. Today he seems freed creatively by the return to his solo work, and his new record, *Lindsey Buckingham*, marks a new phase even as it continues the experimental pop-rock of 2011's *Seeds We Sow*.

Some artists thrive on collaboration but Buckingham handled everything on the album himself, from playing every instrument to engineering, producing and mixing in his home studio. "I recorded it on an old Sony 48-track reel-to-reel," he says. "But it's getting hard to find tape for it. I had this one attempt at learning Pro Tools but I picked the wrong time – I took a unit out on the road with Fleetwood Mac but it wasn't the environment for me to really take it in. I should have learned Pro Tools years ago, because it's right up my alley."

There's a modest amount of gear in his home studio but it's all equipment that Buckingham knows inside out, which allows him to work quickly and intuitively. Not that he knows the names of most of it. "Do you want me to walk out to the studio and look? I just don't register this stuff, I'm so non-technical, you know…"

Once in the studio, Buckingham reveals that he plugs his Stratocaster straight into the tape machine, sometimes through a Radial Firefly DI box. His Martin, Taylor and Turner Renaissance acoustics are both direct and mic'd, while for leads, such as the screaming solos that close *On The Wrong Side* and *Power Down*, he uses a Roland Guitar Synthesizer. "It's direct but it sounds like you're going through an amp turned up to 11. Back in the old days, I might have gone back to a Les Paul for a lead."

Other effects, including his favourite, delay, are provided by rack units, the Alesis MidiVerb 4 and Lexicon PCM 70. Perhaps it's no wonder that Buckingham has forgotten some of the details of his gear: the album was recorded in 2018 but its release was delayed by emergency heart surgery, the resulting damage to Buckingham's voice and the small matter of a global pandemic. The guitarist is delighted that it's finally coming out and keen to get back on tour. Due to the number of tunings he uses, he'll be accompanied on the road by every Turner Model 1 he owns, plus seven Renaissance acoustics and four Taylors.

"There would be riots if I didn't play any Fleetwood Mac," he says. "But beyond that I have no idea what the set's gonna be. It all seems so intangible to me because it's been so long. But my Turner guitars have become such a part of the stage. I can't imagine having been as effective without them, you know?"

During the pandemic, Buckingham has laid low, playing guitar so infrequently that his callouses have gone. But he's started looking to the future again and has even laid down some new material in his studio.

"There were quite a few months where I didn't do much of anything,but finally I finished a couple of new songs in the studio. I've only done two. But I've got a bunch of other ideas and a bunch of voice memos on my phone of me humming, ideas I could be working on. I'd not been overly motivated to do too much but I finally said, 'I gotta go reclaim my discipline.'" G

***Lindsey Buckingham* is out 10 September on Reprise/Rhino**

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Character Study

WORDS HUW BAINES
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

The actor, singer and guitarist Johnny Flynn on making friends with an old Tokai, why playing his National resonator requires a certain level of fitness, setting guitars on fire, and channelling epic poetry on his new album with environmental writer Robert Macfarlane

Johnny Flynn has plenty to say about destiny, or at least the idea that things sometimes find their way into the right set of hands at the right time. It might be the handwritten songbook he inherited from his mother as a child – where radio hits by Neil Diamond sat alongside traditional folk songs – or the Tokai S-type that weaves its way throughout his new record after he stumbled across it in his brother-in-law's attic. "The origin of it is unknown, lost," he says. "I'm sure that fate will intervene and force my hand to leave it with somebody else at some point."

The indie-folk songwriter turned star of stage and screen – you may have recently seen him as George Knightley opposite Anya Taylor-Joy as the titular *Emma*, or witnessed his turn as David Bowie in biopic *Stardust* – has stitched this thread throughout his new record *Lost In The Cedar Wood*. A bracing set of songs dredged from the depths of the pandemic and co-authored with the environmental writer Robert Macfarlane, Flynn's fifth LP draws from a story that has echoed for thousands of years.

Gibson
USA

Epic Games

The Epic of Gilgamesh is the oldest long poem known to mankind. Discovered in the mid-1800s in what is now Iraq, the text was traced back to a great library in Nineveh, a city in ancient Mesopotamia, and later confirmed to house the earliest recorded version of the flood myth. In the tale of Gilgamesh and his companion Enkidu, Flynn and Macfarlane found fragments that rang out afresh in the world under COVID: friendship, grief, environmental destruction.

"It felt like the story that just kept giving," says Flynn. "There were many layers that resonated in such beautiful, synchronistic ways to the feeling, the impulse, that we had. It felt serendipitous but also shocking at times. We started talking about the album in the middle of March 2020, when the virus was spreading. It was a way through it, to hold each other and help each other and look after each other. There was a real feeling of getting onto the ark."

Flynn's 1934 National Trojan is a challenge to play – but a rewarding one

The record took close to a year to compile, with the duo sending ideas and snippets back and forth by means both traditional and modern, with notebooks holding sway alongside WhatsApp exchanges and voice memos. They began to assemble songs that delved into the resonance of *Gilgamesh* but also, in moments such as the lilting *Gods And Monsters*, the circumstances around the poem's discovery. The track was inspired by the death of English Assyriologist George Smith – who had confirmed *Gilgamesh*'s account of the Great Flood – in Aleppo in 1876 while on the trail of more knowledge about the tablets, and what it means for a story to remain open-ended.

There are gaps in the source material that they have filled with melodies and short-form treatises on a work that's already had voluminous amounts of ink spilled over it. Flynn views songs, self-contained and expressive in a singular way, as a worthy vehicle for the challenge. "Songs are not books, or novels," he says. "There's a magic that is exclusive to them. A song isn't an epic but it can contain a whole universe." He adds: "If you've written a song well, economically, the listener can bring their whole life to it. That is where the depth comes from."

Solar Power

Lost In The Cedar Wood was recorded in a couple of bursts. The first was an exercise in capturing ambience as Flynn decamped to the Hampshire countryside to track eight songs at a solar-powered home studio alongside a small cast of collaborators including Cosmo and Merlin Sheldrake, and Flora Wallace. "One minute there was the sound of birdsong through the windows and the next chainsaws starting up as we were singing about the destruction of the cedar wood in ancient Mesopotamia," says Flynn. "We could hear the pine forest next door being felled by loggers."

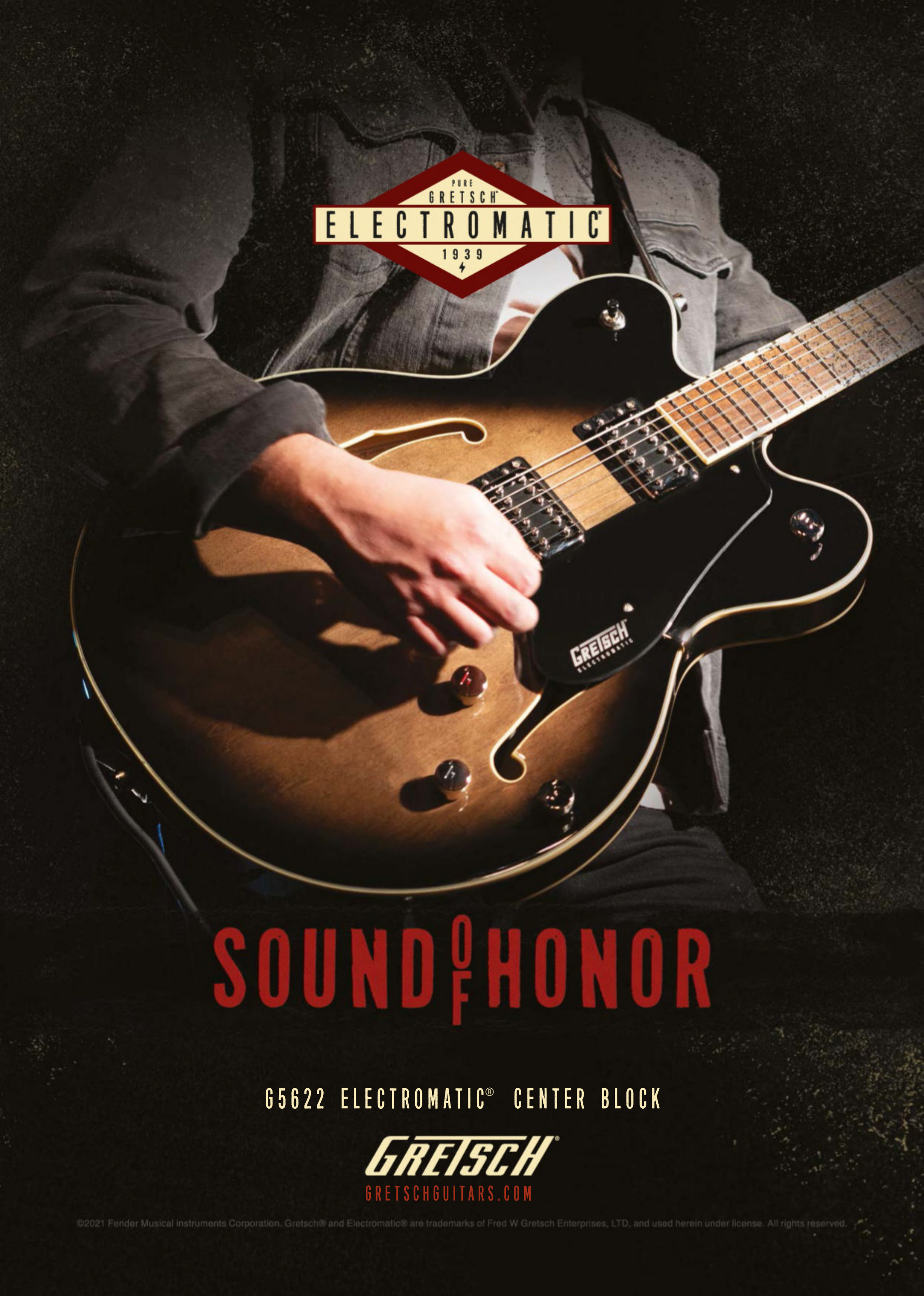
“I WAS OBSESSED WITH JIMI HENDRIX SO I SET IT ON FIRE. I’M QUITE PROUD OF THESE BURN MARKS I MADE WHEN I WAS ABOUT TEN”

Efforts were made to allow found sounds such as these to refract across the songs, and once recording moved to the Old Workshop in London, producer Charlie Andrew was keen to maintain this spirit.

“It’s good to create the right situation to make something,” Flynn observes. “Studios are often very sterile environments. I like records when you can hear the conditions they were made in, like *The Basement Tapes* or *Music From Big Pink*, where the story of them setting up the studio and living in this house is as much a part of the atmosphere as the sound.”

The Dylan link isn’t idle. Many years ago Flynn had his mind blown by a CD copy of *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* that he bought at a school jumble sale, having recognised *Blowin’ In The Wind* as an entry in his mother’s songbook. “It’s so evocative and atmospheric and touching,” he says. Flynn’s first guitar, a sunburst Squier Strat, was purchased on Denmark Street with his father. “I was obsessed with Jimi Hendrix so I set it on fire,” he remembers with a laugh. “It looked a bit clean. I’m quite proud of these burn marks I made when I was about 10, sitting there with a lighter. I didn’t have any lighter fluid.”

Flynn’s first LP alongside his band The Sussex Wit, 2008’s *A Larum*, emerged from a folk morass in London that he had a small hand in cultivating. After seeing the anti-folk movement up close in New York, he and a group of musicians attempted to foster a similar vibe, coinciding with the rise of tourmates Mumford & Sons and old friend Laura Marling. If it wasn’t a scene, it was certainly a happening of sorts. Dig up an old photo from that era and you might see the same guitar slung about Flynn’s shoulders as you would today: a 1934 National Trojan.



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"THE ORIGIN OF IT IS UNKNOWN. I'M SURE FATE WILL INTERVENE AND FORCE ME TO LEAVE IT WITH SOMEBODY ELSE AT SOME POINT"

National Anthems

In 2006, maybe 2007, Flynn took another wander along Denmark Street. This time he had an eye on picking something up to fill the hole left by a dobro borrowed from Emmy the Great, which he'd been forced to relinquish once it came time to tour. He found what he was looking for in the possession of luthier Celine Camerlynck.

"I took the first bit of money I was paid by my label. I'd heard about this woman restoring guitars and went up to the workshop," says Flynn. "I think I paid about £1,300. I play it all the time. It's so inelegant. It's got a very thick neck, the truss rod is super-thick.

"You have to have really strong hands. If you played other guitars all the time, you'd pick it up and fuck your hand up within seconds. You have to get specifically fit for this one guitar. Every record I make, I try not to use it. But every time I record a song I go, 'I think the National would sound good on this'. There's no denying it. I got a humbucker fitted on it so you can put it through an amp and it'll sound really warm but you still have the pluck of the resonator system. It's become a part of me."

The National is perhaps the key voice on songs such as the loping *Ten Degrees Of Strange*, where Flynn's playing mirrors the lyric's preoccupation with running to escape grief and depression. But another vital contributor to the conversation throughout *Lost In The Cedar Wood* is a Martin 00 that owes something to the theatre. It belongs to playwright and screenwriter Jez Butterworth, whose credits include co-writing the James Bond movie *Spectre*, plus *Ford v Ferrari* and even the upcoming sixth Indiana Jones film.

"I did this play of his called *Jerusalem*," says Flynn. "We finished and he was going to be alone with his kids in the West Country. My wife was away, I only had one kid at the time. He was like, 'Bring Gabriel down to my place – I've got nothing to do, you've got nothing to do, we can kick around'. We spent a week walking with our babies, and he's got loads of guitars. This one was on the wall. I'd been so in love with those plucky Martins and Gibsons from the 60s, the kind you'd hear Dylan playing.

"I'd never seen one in the flesh. I love parlour guitars too, the shape of them, and this is a bit like that. I was playing it all night, on the night before I left. The next morning I came down and Jez had packed it up in a case by the front door. It wasn't a gift more than a long loan.

This vintage Martin 00 is on loan from screenwriter and playwright Jez Butterworth

"I keep trying to get it back to him but for various reasons it keeps not making it there. I feel guilty. I genuinely am trying."

The Martin, then, is another one of those guitars that found its way to Flynn at an opportune moment – and, at least for the time being, it isn't quite ready to leave his side. But Flynn is not one for empty gestures either, so its inclusion at key points in his discography is because it brings something to his songs as though it's playing a role. There's no separating Flynn the actor and Flynn the musician, it seems.

"I cast characters," he admits. "Every instrument, for me, is an energetic character." G

***Lost In The Cedar Wood* is out now on Transgressive.**

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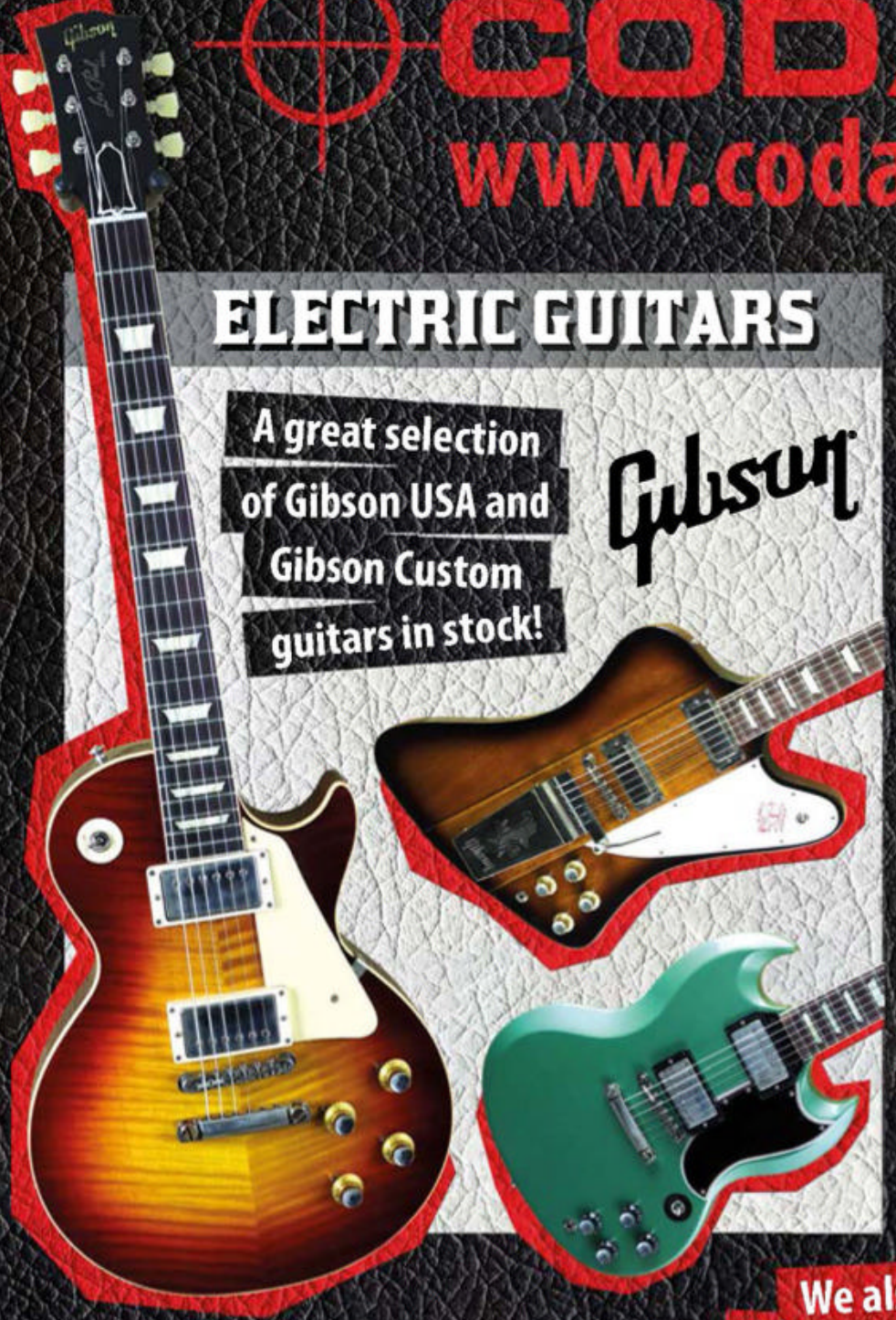

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BLUES

Boston trio GA-20 bring twin-guitar fun to their hot-rodded brand of punk blues, channelling the spirit of the Chicago greats but with a 2021 twist. We meet guitarist Matt Stubbs to talk pawnshop guitars, playing loud and the band's veneration of Hound Dog Taylor

WORDS HUW BAINES

SPIRIT

Remakes have a bad rep. And largely, they deserve it. 'But the zombies are fast in this one', isn't much of a hook but it's still better than a shot-for-shot slog through a classic that adds nothing to the conversation except a dash of lurid colour. Into this tangle of thorns walk GA-20, whose new record might have fallen into the second camp had it not been executed with so much care and attention.

Try It...You Might Like It! finds the Boston blues trio made up of guitarist Matt Stubbs, singer/guitarist Pat Faherty and drummer Tim Carman setting their sights on the Midwest in order to rekindle the magic of Chicago bluesman Theodore Roosevelt 'Hound Dog' Taylor, as well as his band, the Houserockers.

ABOVE Despite its compact appearance, Stubbs says this 1954 Harmony Stratotone Newport has the fattest neck he's ever played

ABOVE TOP Matt's uncle bought this 1968 Fender Jaguar new in the 60s before gifting it to Stubbs when he turned 21

ABOVE RIGHT A Gibson ES-295 reissue with Bigsby from Matt's collection

OPPOSITE To best approximate Hound Dog's tone, Pat Faherty bought a handful of Teisco guitars. This four-pickup 1960s number came the closest and is used on the album

Over the course of 10 songs they seek to do justice to the lean, mean, all-live spirit of Hound Dog's 1971 self-titled LP – which launched the legendary Alligator Records and was produced by its founder Bruce Iglauer – and its follow up *Natural Boogie*.

"I've always been really into traditional Chicago blues, dating back to before Hound Dog and all the way up to the early 70s and that stuff that he did," says Matt. "What speaks to me about it, especially those three guys in the Houserockers, is that when they play together, it's like an ensemble thing. When Hound Dog plays a screaming note, Ted Harvey on the drums reacts to it. There's a lot of interaction going on there. Sometimes in the blues, depending on the style or era, they don't always do that. Even though it sounds crazy and bombastic, the more you listen to it, you realise that they're playing as a group, almost a jazz approach."

MIRROR IMAGE

The Houserockers' take on the blues – with a second guitarist, Brewer Phillips, in place of a bassist – is mirrored in GA-20's own setup and philosophy. The group formed in 2018 when Stubbs, who plays in Charlie Musselwhite's touring band, was staring at a year off while the harmonica legend toured with Ben Harper in support of their joint LP *No Mercy in This Land*. "Pat and I were buddies and I needed to do some local gigs," says Matt. "To be honest, it was, 'Let's just do a trio so we can make more money.'

"I loved all these old Chicago blues records and a lot of them didn't have bass. It was two guitars and one would play something like a bassline. Going forward, we arranged stuff to fit. Live, Pat and I both use two amps. We'll have a cleaner, fatter, more low-end amp on the bottom and stack on top of that a small tweed amp, get your hair and your distortion out of that."

Three years along the line, GA-20 are, as their beginnings would suggest, a well-drilled live outfit who play loud, lean songs steeped in the Chicago style, eschewing the flabby middle of their contemporaries. Robert Christgau once called Hound Dog and the Houserockers "the Ramones of the blues" and GA-20 are also driven by a desire to keep things sharp and to the point. "I'm a guitar player so I'm probably supposed to like solos more than I do," admits Stubbs. "Pat and I joke about it."

He continues: "If we have a 60-minute set, we do 22 songs. If we're at festivals, a lot of the more modern blues stuff is just a platform for a really long guitar solo. It's a slow blues, and here we go. It's going to be 15 minutes. That's great if you want to hear all the fireworks for a long time. We prefer to play songs. I'd rather do a three-minute song and have it be catchy and have a mood to it. Maybe there's a solo, maybe there isn't. All the old blues was like that."

GIVE IT A TRY

GA-20's retro 2019 debut album *Lonely Soul* prized the chemistry and dynamic shifts that can be created by a well-calibrated trio, and the solid nature of its construction works in their favour when playing things fast and loose on their latest long player. The group's chops and cohesiveness were put to the test over two days of live tracking at Matt's studio that were designed to mirror Hound Dog's own blueprints. "We rehearsed weekly for two or three months during the pandemic," says Stubbs. "Luckily it was nice out so we just did it on my deck quietly and got everything arranged.

"The actual recording process, we went into the studio and I tried to come at it like those guys. I talked to Bruce from Alligator and asked him what they were using for gear, what was the setup, how was the workflow. From what I understand, they

went into a studio and played like it was a live gig. It was all set up in a room, they didn't have headphones, they played loud. I think it was just two tracks to tape. So that was what we went for. We didn't do a bunch of takes of each song, maybe two passes, three passes. As soon as it felt right, we just moved on. We recorded that whole record in a day and a half. It was real minimal, no overdubs."

As you might expect from a band named after a vintage Gibson tube amp, they viewed the hardware that would help bring these songs back to life as a vital element in their planning. Faherty and Stubbs set about finding a handful of Teisco and Kingston guitars to match the instruments that Hound Dog leaned on, with Matt also matching a vintage Telecaster to Brewer Phillips' contributions.

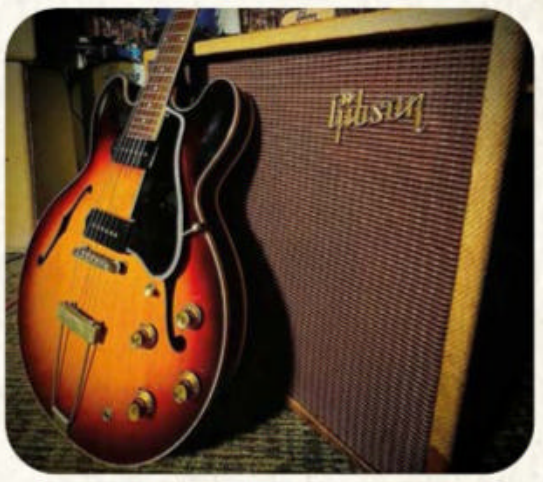
"Pat and I just did what I think a lot of guitar nerds do," says Stubbs, "we spent a lot of time on the internet looking for deals. I think we bought three or four different ones. Teisco had different pickups, right? A lot of people are hip to the gold foils. We bought a couple like that and quickly realised when we started looking at pictures and talking to Bruce about Hound Dog that he actually used these weird rectangle-looking pickups. Pat bought two different guitars with those in them and we just A/B'ed them. It was pretty clear right away which one sounded just like Hound Dog. We got all those guitars really cheap too. I don't think we paid more than $300 for any of them. Pat has two left. He sold the ones he didn't like."

Stubbs tried not to 'produce' the record in the traditional sense, preferring to maintain an air of simplicity to better preserve the spirit of the endeavour. But one area that he opted to have his own say, chiefly from the perspective of a long-time Hound Dog listener, was in the amp setup and its ability to add a little more warmth and ballast.

"Pat used a little five-watt Silvertone," says Stubbs. "Hound Dog used a big Silvertone with six 10-inch speakers. I have one like that but the studio we used is pretty small. I wanted to have an amp that we could control a little bit in the room. The first day, I had that and a couple of other Silvertones, Pat went into his side of the room and played slide, we'd just record, listen back, A/B it. I wanted to have the character that Hound Dog had but I wanted it to have a little bit more low end.

"I love Hound Dog but if I listen to two of his albums back to back sometimes my ear gets a little fatigued. There's so much top end. I played through an old Gibson GA-20. That one always sounds great. That took two minutes to set up – plugged it in and turned it on. We set up like we do live, and put one baffle behind each amp so it didn't bleed too much into the drum mics."

While it's easy to see this attention to gear detail as a necessary offshoot of recreating another artist's sound, it also says plenty about GA-20 as musicians.



"I'VE ALWAYS BEEN A GEAR GUY. I'M INTO VINTAGE GEAR. ANY GUITAR I OWN THAT'S NEW IS INSPIRED BY A VINTAGE GUITAR TOO"

Stubbs first played a black American Standard Stratocaster and learnt the ropes in the wake of his guitarist father, skipping from the eye-opening riff of Lenny Kravitz' *Are You Gonna Go My Way* into Hendrix before falling down the blues rabbit hole in his mid-teens. Quickly, however, he came to appreciate guitars as more than mere tools of the trade. GA-20's own material feels lived-in and appropriately weathered as a result, and that current in their sound is rendered by a deliberate set of equipment choices.

Live, Stubbs calls on a 1960s Silvertone 1454, a 1964 Fender Jazzmaster and a Telecaster through a 1965 Fender Vibrolux Reverb and, you guessed it, a 1960 GA-20. Faherty, meanwhile, pairs a 1950s Harmony Stratotone Newport with a 1966 Fender Pro Reverb and a modified Fender Pro Junior with a 12-inch speaker, calling from time to time on a supporting cast of Jazzmasters, Teles and Teiscos.

"I've always been a guitar-gear guy," says Stubbs. "I'm into vintage gear. Any guitar I own that's new is inspired by a vintage guitar too. Guitars were always important, they all have their own character." G

***Try It...You Might Like It!* is out now on Alligator/Colemine**

ABOVE TOP Another 1960s Harmony Stratotone alongside a modern Harmony Jupiter, which Matt takes on tour and keeps tuned down to C♯

ABOVE LEFT Stubbs used his 1960s Silvertone 1454 throughout GA-20's first album and it remains his main touring guitar. He plays it so much he bought a second to keep as a backup

ABOVE RIGHT Matt's 1960 Gibson ES-330 is another classy vintage choice

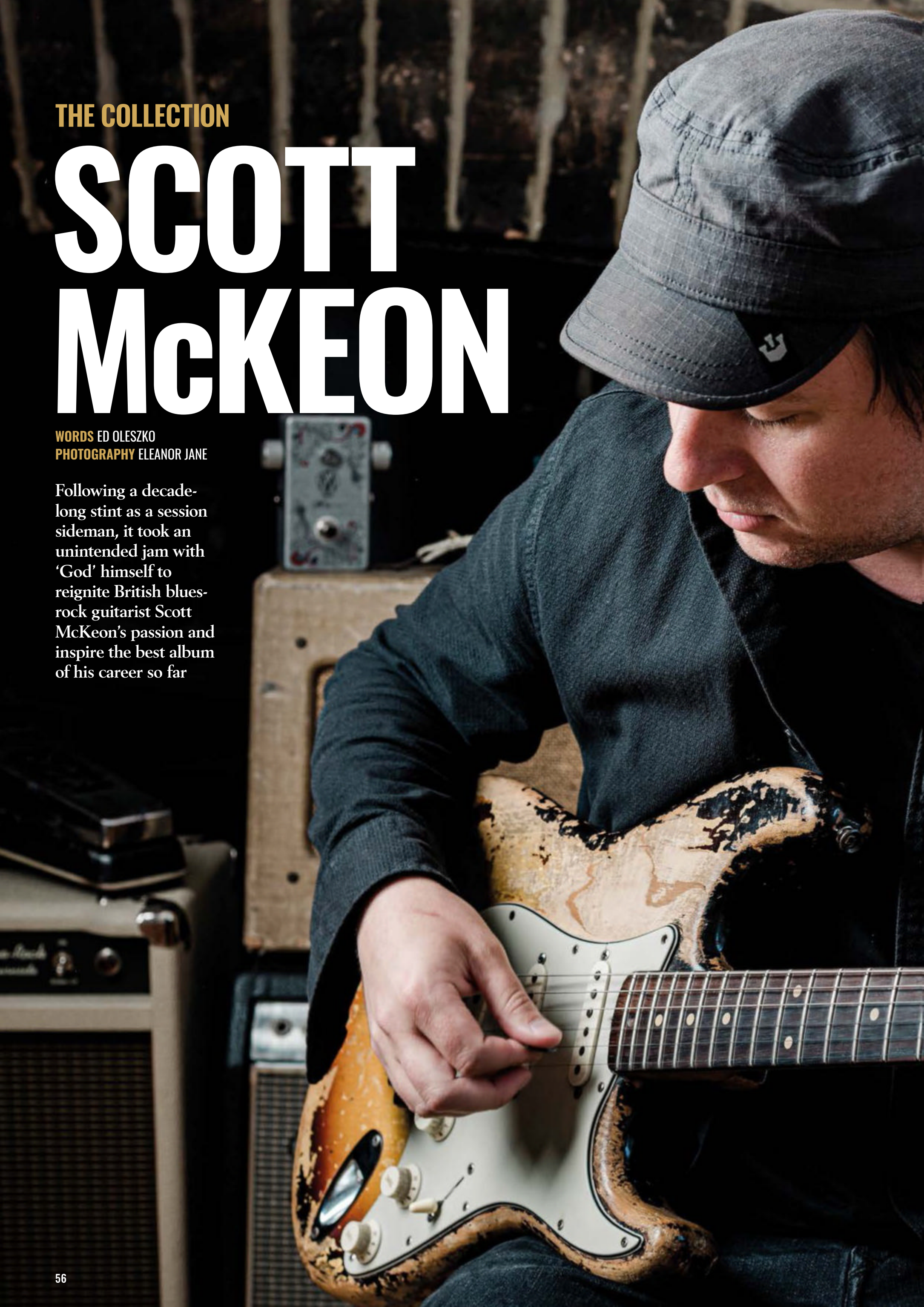
OPPOSITE Matt with the Blackguard Tele he regards as "the perfect guitar in every way"

THE COLLECTION

SCOTT McKEON

WORDS ED OLESZKO
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

Following a decade-long stint as a session sideman, it took an unintended jam with 'God' himself to reignite British blues-rock guitarist Scott McKeon's passion and inspire the best album of his career so far



Marshall
QUAD REVERB

Scott's Fender Custom Shop Pink Sparkle Telecaster Thinline features a TV Jones Filter'Tron in the neck for a blend of classic Tele and Gretsch tones. It's been signed by Quincy Jones

Produced by respected Oasis and Black Crowes collaborator Paul Stacey, Scott McKeon's 2021 album *New Morning* is a bona fide guitar record. For fans of blues, rock and even jazz, there's plenty to dig into over the album's nine tracks, which bristle with energy thanks to a live-band feel and no shortage of passion, dynamics and classic guitar tones. Swampy blues licks and emotive slide sit alongside sparkling 12-string textures and moody baritone riffs throughout. While the extended solos and band jams evoke McKeon's 1960s guitar heroes in intent, when delivered with as fiery an intensity as they are here, it's clear that he's still pushing the blues-guitar genre forward.

A child guitar prodigy, inspired by his dad's love of blues, soul and rock music, Scott took up the instrument at the age of just four – check out @scottmckeon33 on Instagram to see a recently posted clip of his seven-year-old self ripping out some lead guitar on a British children's TV show – and by 13, he was gigging and fronting his own band.

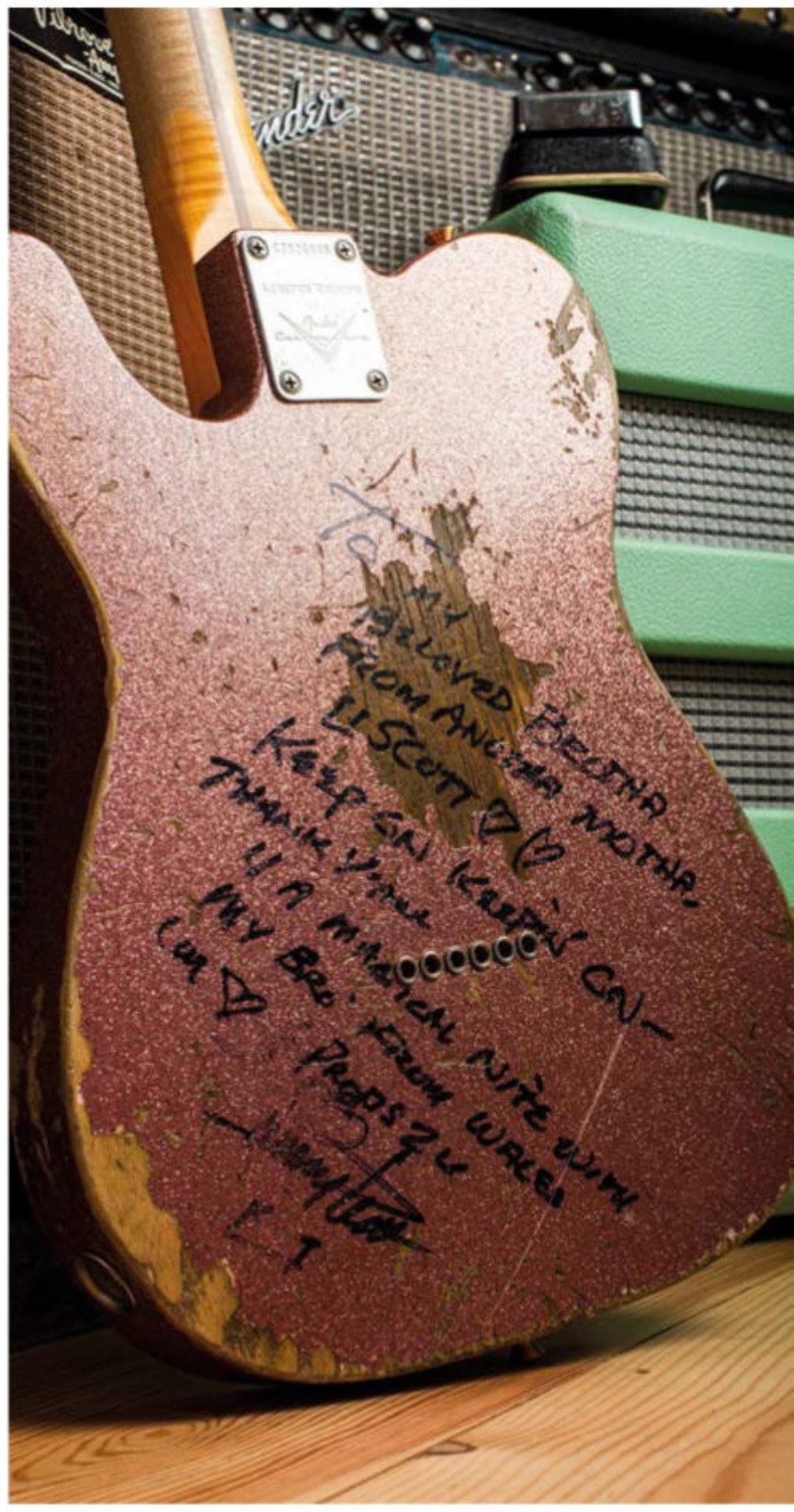
In the years that followed, Scott would go on to tour internationally and open for the likes of Derek Trucks, Gary Clark Jr and even Joe Bonamassa at the Royal Albert Hall, before he embarked upon a 10-year spell as a session guitarist. He's even ventured into the world of boutique pedal building. Here, we sit down with McKeon at his home in the south of England to check out his guitar collection and discuss his return to original music. We might have a few other questions written down too. Like: hey, didn't you jam with Eric Clapton?

SESSION PRO

As we settle into Scott's living room, it's clear that it's a creative hub for a busy working musician. Two-Rocks, Marshalls, the walls are lined with amplifiers and cabinets, with vintage Fender and Gibson combos awaiting their next missions nearby. On the floor, an array of colourful fuzz, boost and wah pedals are vying for attention with the stripped floorboards.

"I haven't done any of my own music for a decade or so," says McKeon. "I just got disillusioned with it all. I wanted to just be a musician for a while. The blues world can be quite isolated when you're doing your own touring and playing your own shows constantly. About 10 years ago, I moved to London and started doing session stuff. Then I met Robbie McIntosh and I just wanted to be a session guitarist in that sort of mould."

Fender


Fender

OPPOSITE TOP McKeon's 1965 Jaguar is a staple for blues, especially into his vintage Gibson GA-5 amp

OPPOSITE MIDDLE Scott fitted Firebird pickups to this Gibson Melody Maker, while his white Strat is ideal for that Jimi vibe

OPPOSITE BOTTOM Scott's modern Gibson Hummingbird

Unsurprisingly, success in the session world followed. Scott has featured both live and in the studio with the likes of Emeli Sandé, James Arthur, Lana Del Ray, Van Morrison and even Ed Sheeran. One notable session even led to a more longterm position in the backing band of a music legend. "I worked for Tom Jones at a session," says Scott, "joined his band and toured with him for the past six years, and continue to do so. It's an amazing gig!"

As talk turns to gear, Scott proudly shows us his spectacularly well-worn sunburst 1962 Fender Stratocaster, the guitar most closely associated with the English bluesman and which has been his near-constant gigging and recording companion for more than a decade.

"I've had it since I was 12," he says. "I use it every day. It's got a real sentimental value to me as my dad got it for me. Sadly, he passed away not long after, when I was 13. Every time I play I think of him."

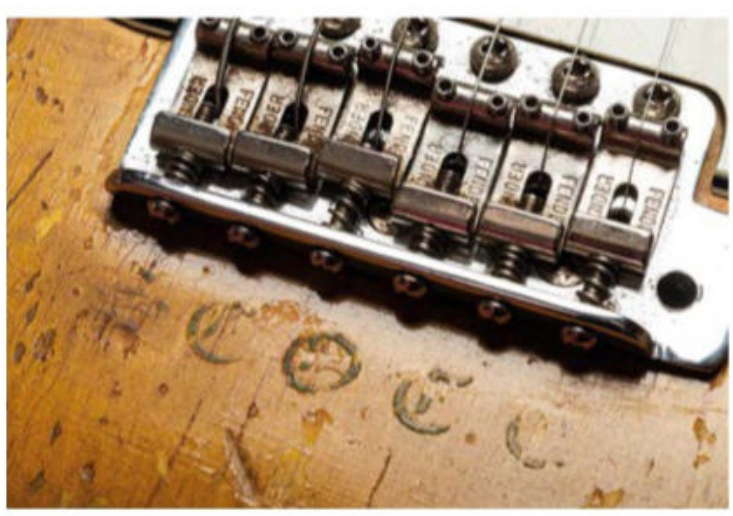
Much of the Strat's wear has come from Scott. "Because of the way I play, I've put a lot of the wear on it myself over the years. It was far less worn when I got it but now it's got a very unique look and wear to it. Buddy Guy has even signed the back!"

As a busy working musician, exposing such a prized instrument to the dangers of the road is not without risk, and Scott notes that there have been times when he's been hesitant to take his number-one guitar along. "If I'm carrying it myself to a gig or session then it's fine," he says. "But it's best not to take the old '62 if other people are setting things up or if I'm doing a lot of travelling."

Given that the familiar feel and tone of Scott's beloved Strat provide him with such clear inspiration, having to leave the guitar at home might present something of an inconvenience. However, help

was at hand from the Fender Custom Shop. "[Master Builder] Dale Wilson actually got in touch with me having seen my Strat on Instagram," says Scott, beaming. "He asked if I would be interested in them making me a replica."

Needless to say, he jumped at the chance. "We flew the '62 over to Fender and they had it for a month or so to get the exact wear patterns and to perfectly copy the look and feel. Then, a year or so later, the replica turned up and completely blew me away! They even got the 'Scott' decals on the front right, it's uncanny!"



SLOWHAND AT THE WHEEL

Despite excelling in the role of sideman and studio pro for more than a decade, Scott's passion to release his own music again was rekindled following a chance gig with Eric Clapton in 2018.

"I ended up doing this charity night for Paul Jones [Manfred Mann] in 2018 at G Live in Guildford," says Scott. "I was in the house band backing a bunch of different artists. There was word of Eric coming down but no-one was sure. Paul Jones and Tom Jones were doing it as well, along with Van Morrison, so it wasn't a bad line-up!"

ABOVE Fender Custom Shop Master Builder Dale Wilson kept Scott's 1962 Strat in his workshop for over a month to ensure that the replica (right) would be as close as possible

It was also the debut gig for the Custom Shop replica of Scott's '62 Strat, which had arrived just a few days earlier. "I used that with a couple of pedals," he says. "There was a Jan Ray and my own SM Fuzz into a Two-Rock Classic Reverb and my 1964 Fender Vibroverb. A pretty simple and versatile setup to cover a bunch of songs. We were in the soundcheck and Clapton was stood right next to me, so I thought I'd better play something half-decent! Luckily, he was nodding along and seemed to enjoy what I was doing. During his soundcheck, his mic kept feeding back, so rather than stop the song he nodded at me to take the solo. It was *Before You Accuse Me* or something so I just played away and fortunately, he seemed to be receptive to it! After soundcheck I felt like I needed a lie down or something!"

Later that evening, Clapton was watching most of the gig from the side of the stage until the time came for him to perform. "It got to his part of the set and I didn't think I'd get a solo," Scott admits. "But instead, every song he kept looking around and nodding at me to take one! After the gig he came over and was really complimentary, and said, 'Nice playing, it sounded great', and how it's nice to hear someone who's doing blues stuff and who 'gets it'."

In terms of both confidence and creative drive, hearing such praise from Slowhand himself proved an instant reawakening for Scott. "I came home after that gig totally enthused. I called my friend Paul Stacey immediately and said, 'You would not believe the night I've just had!' It stressed me out a bit, though, as I know Eric is the kind of person that, if he likes someone a bit, he'll go and check them out online or something. But I hadn't put anything out for years, so I started thinking, 'Fuck, what if he checks me out and I haven't put out anything for ages'. It was then that Paul was like, 'You need to do another album – and you need to do it properly!'"

STUDIO TIME

With his creative flame now reignited, along with Stacey, Scott set about putting the perfect band together to support his songs. Built around the core of drummer and Paul's twin brother Jeremy Stacey – whose formidable credits include Noel Gallagher, Sheryl Crow and King Crimson – bassist Rocco Palladino (son of session legend Pino), and acclaimed jazz keyboard player Ross Stanley, the band were joined by Scott's Rufus Black bandmate Gavin Conder to provide vocals on several tracks.

ABOVE LEFT Scott's prototype Octave Fuzz and SM Fuzz surrounded by contemporary boutique pedals, classic vintage Fuzz Faces, wahs and Tube Screamers

Recording took place at several London studios, including RAK and Fish Factory, with Stacey setting up the musicians to play together in one room, jamming and reacting to each other's playing in the manner of the classic 60s and 70s albums Scott so admires.

"We really wanted to have the guitar front and centre, like some of the amazing Jeff Beck stuff or the Bloomfield *Super Session*," says Scott. "We had this sort of old-school mindset, like some of those albums where it sounds like the band are all there together in one room in the studio, a couple of mics up and they're just having fun jamming."

Despite wanting *New Morning* to have a live-band feel, Scott recalls that he and Paul put in a lot a of prior planning and preparation, both in the songwriting and how the record would turn out sonically. "We discussed what we liked and didn't like about guitar albums," he says. "How sometimes there isn't actually a lot of guitar on them or people do loads of takes and comp together solos and stuff, or even just how it sounds."

Scott even admits that he's been guilty of some of these things on past recordings – "how you sort of dumb down your guitar tone, trying to be more poppy or something. But really the thing you're good at, the thing you've worked on for years, is your guitar playing and defining your own guitar tone."

That the sonic backbone of the album and its title track were recorded using Scott's prized 1962 Stratocaster will come as no surprise. However, other guitars in Scott and Paul Stacey's collections helped fill out the sonic spectrum.

Scott is a massive fan of the beautiful-sounding gold foil pickups in his superb mid-1960s Harmony Rocket

"I used an old 1950s Framus archtop for some stuff on the track *Angerstein Road*, mic'd up with an old RCA BK-5 ribbon mic," says Scott. "I also used my lovely red mid-60s Harmony Rocket with its amazing gold foil pickups on some parts, and a more modern Danelectro baritone tuned to A flat for the rhythm stuff on *Third Eye Witness*."

Other instruments used include Scott's stunning Custom Shop Pink Sparkle Telecaster Thinline with a TV Jones pickup in the neck, while for chunkier tones he pulled out Paul Stacey's '68 Les Paul Custom and a Terry Morgan LP replica. "That's an incredible Les Paul, the Terry Morgan," says Scott. "Jimmy Page used it when he played with The Black Crowes at Shepherds Bush Empire a few years ago."

WALL OF SOUND

When it came to amps, Stacey and McKeon went big, setting up "a wall of really loud amps and cabs in another room". The amps were mic'd and later blended to taste at the mixdown stage to get the required tone. "We had my '64 Vibroverb," says Scott, "a '68 Deluxe, a bunch of Two-Rock heads and cabs, my 1974 Marshall JMP, a small 1950s Gibson Les Paul Jr amp and lots of pedals."

Indeed, Scott is something of a pedal connoisseur, having designed and released his own SM Fuzz some years ago. "I had the prototype of the fuzz I had put together on my board at the Royal Albert Hall gig back in 2009, supporting Joe Bonamassa," he says. "Joe came over and asked what it was and could I make him one!"

Interest from other players and friends soon led to Scott release it. "Initial interest was good and we sold loads but then interest died out a bit so we stopped doing them. A couple of years back, a friend pointed out to me that the originals were going for crazy money on eBay. I thought we'd better start doing them again, and they've become really popular again with players like Gary Clark Jr, Doyle Bramhall II and James Bay, which is great"

Scott is preparing to release a new pedal too, the SM Octave Fuzz. "This is all over the new album too," he says with pride – and proud he should be. Back in the game with the best album of his career under his belt and ready once again to perform his own music in front of live audiences, there's plenty more to come from Scott McKeon. G

Head over to scottmckeon.co.uk for upcoming dates and visit smfuzz.com for more on Scott's pedals

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FUZZ WAS THE FUTURE

PART TWO: ACCIDENTS HAPPEN

Continuing his mini-series on the birth of fuzz, JHS Pedals founder Josh Scott tells the story of how a happy accident changed the course of music history forever

WORDS JOSH SCOTT

© Michael Ochs Archives / Getty Images / Getty Images

Last month, I explained how a ride in my dad's truck soundtracked by Marty Robbins' 1959 LP *Gunfighter Ballads And Trail Songs* stoked my passion for music – and how, to my surprise, I later learnt how instrumental Marty was to the evolution of the guitar's sound. This week, I want to break down exactly what happened during one of Marty's should-have-been-normal recording sessions and address why it ended up being one of the most important moments in music history. Yeah, I know that's a bold statement but stay with me.

Like many other milestones in guitar history, this one was an accident. It all starts in a New York factory, where a none-the-wiser technician put together three recording consoles before having one of them shipped to the Quonset Hut studio in Nashville.

Unbeknown to the recipients of this custom-ordered studio desk – Glenn Snoddy and brothers Harold and Owen Bradley – these consoles had a few issues – and by "a few", I mean 35 improperly calibrated output transformers. As Glenn explained in an interview with NAMM's *Oral History* program, "prior to making the transformers, they misjudged the windings somehow or other, and there were 250 volts going through the winding instead of the transformers, and one malfunctioned at the exact time that Grady [Martin] was playing his guitar solo through it".

Grady Martin? Wait, what was he recording when this accident went down? Eh, nothing much, just a single called *Don't Worry* by A-list country star Marty Robbins. The chances of this moment coinciding with this situation are astronomical. You'd get better odds on seeing the Gallagher brothers hugging it out before an Oasis reunion concert at Knebworth tomorrow.

OPPOSITE Country singer Marty Robbins performing in Nashville circa 1965

Forensics of Fuzz

As important as this moment is, I've never heard it explained in a way that I deem acceptable. Every article and interview that I have ever read about this event glances over the fine details of the day, which in my opinion does an enormous disservice to the history of our instrument and the weight of what really happened. With that said, here is my attempt to tell the whole story.

Picture it: Nashville, 1960. It's time to record a new radio single for the biggest rising star in country music, Marty Robbins. Musicians and studio crew arrive at the backyard Quonset hut studio late in the morning, step out of their cars onto the gravel parking lot and greet each other with cigarettes in hand (this was 1960; literally everyone smoked). They make small talk about what happened the night before. A few more minutes pass before they file into the entrance one by one and make their way to their spots in the room.

A typical recording session of the era, here Elvis Presley is backed up by vocal quartet the Jordanaires, with Bill Black on upright bass and DJ Fontana on drums

The crew has this down to a science. Everyone knows their place. For these studio professionals, recording a song is just like swinging a hammer – only with a little more finesse. Day in and day out, these seasoned pros create songs, at this point almost from instinct. They are the best of the best and they rarely make mistakes. Remember, it's 1960, 38 years before Pro Tools would let you cheat in the studio. Once the tape recorder started, every musician had to do a flawless take. If not, everyone would have to re-record the song from the beginning, even if the bassist was the only one out of sync. A song could be tracked in a few minutes and on most days these musicians would deal with a host of different styles, artists and genres. Time was money and this band knew how to stay on budget.

"Five minutes," Don Law's familiar voice calls from the control. With guitars in hand, drumsticks ready to swing and the control room prepped to track, there is now an urgency to be on point. There are a few last-minute adjustments to microphones and preamps as an engineer named Glen Snoddy scrambles around the tracking room to make sure everything is just right. The outboard gear is warmed up, the tape is ready and the control room gets quiet. Marty is standing in the live room behind a big silver microphone, taking a sip of water and mentally running through his lyrics. Directly in front of him is the band, all seated in a semi-circle of sorts and all within talking distance. The pianist is looking over the chart in front of him. Realising he is the foundation and the lead instrument on this song, he walks over the intro bars and gathers his ideas of what's best for the track. The bass player thumps a few notes and proceeds to tell a joke. The mood is relaxed but serious at the same time.

Grady Martin is seated with his guitar amp at ear level on his right-hand side. The small Fender amp is used as a simple reference monitor and turned up just enough to hear what he is playing in balance with the other instruments in the room. He faces Marty and the vocal microphone while tuning his guitar, a Danelectro six-string electric, model UB2. This guitar, however, is a little different from most factory-made solidbodies – because it's technically a baritone. Because the neck is longer, it reaches much lower on the bass spectrum of notes; instead of a low E note at the bottom of its register, it can reach down to a B. This produces a deep, growling and very firm tone that a standard electric guitar cannot.

Grady was a master guitarist. On this track, he was tracking a style called Tic-Tac, all the rage in Nashville at the time and the secret ingredient to many radio hits. The idea was that the bass player – always on an upright fretless bass – would play the low, deep and standard part we think of as the bassline, and the identical Tic-Tac bass part would be tracked in parallel or on top of that upright bassline. A standard upright bass guitar has a soft attack and a very gentle tone. The initial strike of the note is never really upfront. Part of the reason for this is that upright players don't use a pick, they simply use their fingers to pluck the notes instead. Another major difference in how these sound is that the upright bass (specifically in this era) is recorded by placing a microphone in front of it. This results in an even more subdued and mellow tone, in most cases causing much of this instrument's work to be *felt* rather than heard in a finished song.

The Tic-Tac electric bass is, on the other hand, an electrified guitar by way of magnetic pickups, and plugged into a valve/tube amplifier or directly into the recording console. This produces a punchy and upfront recorded sound in comparison to the upright. The two sounds together are the best of both worlds and are responsible for the movement and catchiness of countless hits by Elvis Presley, Patsy Cline, and the pop music of the 50s in general.

Glenn Snoddy, now in the control room, double-checks the tape machine, glances across the mixing desk, and then Don's voice shouts through the control room door into the live room, "Here we go". A few seconds pass as everyone takes a deep breath to block out everything that isn't the song. Marty looks to his right, towards the drummer, almost hidden behind a tall studio baffle that helps isolate the sound of his louder drums from the quieter vocals and other instruments. Marty says, "Count us in," and the drummer gives a click of his sticks – one, two, three, four, at 100bpm. A few silent counts after that, the piano leads the band in.

The rest was about to be history – but not just normal history. The kind that makes you wonder: what if? What if it hadn't happened? What if the situation had gone any other way? To everyone present in the moment, it was an ordinary day. But 60 years later, we know better. That recording session opened a doorway to something different.

The band plays along perfectly, as usual. Marty's confident and echo-saturated vocals come in at nine seconds (listen closely and you can hear him clear his throat at seven seconds), the bassline is precise, the piano gallops along, pushing the song forward, and the drums are the glue that holds it all together. The song is only to be 3 minutes and 13 seconds, and that means that everything is to-the-point, nothing long-winded. This song has been created for airplay and is conscious of wearing out its welcome. A minute quickly passes and the song is perfectly predictable. Until, that is, the 01:25 mark.

Out of nowhere, Grady Martin's Tic-Tac bass part explodes into an instrumental measure that tears through time and space for an entire 20 seconds. It is the sound of disruption. Everything normal about this safe radio song dies a violent death at the hands of a new sound: fuzz. Listen to it for yourself. But first, forget who you are, forget what you know and forget what you think you know about guitar history. Take it in as if you are there in 1960.

They gather around the recording desk and Glen Snoddy rewinds the tape and hits play. Suddenly, they hear a sound that shocks them all

This is the beginning of guitar's rebellious rise to rule the counterculture generation of the 60s. It wasn't planned. It wasn't expected. And it turns out that, in the moment, it wasn't even heard.

Seeing with Sound

For years, I have played *Don't Worry* over and over with my eyes closed and tried to see the space, the people and the reactions to this accidental moment. This is one of my favourite practices as a music lover who wants to be immersed in the songs I love. Try it sometime on your favourite records from the 50s and 60s. Put on Bob Dylan's *Highway 61 Revisited* and if you listen closely, you can almost see the band's panic as they try to follow Bob's stream of consciousness. The tape machine snaps thousands of unseen musical images that can transport you beyond a song and into a moment if only you'll let them.

Knowing that everyone involved in the recording of *Don't Worry* that day has gone on record with the same exact story that this was a freak accident, I believe that is the truth. The only problem I have with this narrative is that the band never misses a beat, they don't waver from form and there is no reactionary response in their performances. Listen to Marty's vocal re-entry at the 01:46 mark, following the 'surprise' fuzz: it's calm, collected and exactly what it should be in light of a standard instrumental break. But this was anything but standard.

How can this be? I have played hundreds of sessions and I can promise you that if we were live tracking as they were and that fuzzy malfunction came blasting through the room, the session would have come to a screeching halt. Obviously, I was missing something. What did I not understand? How did this otherworldly glitch in music history pass unnoticed right in front of a band sitting just a few feet apart?

I got my answer, quite accidentally, while interviewing Robert Hobbs about his father Revis Hobbs' contribution to the invention of the first fuzz pedal. At the end of the interview, told from Robert's perspective at the time as a teenager, I told him my dilemma. His simple response floored me: "On that tape machine, the way they were tracking, you wouldn't have heard the blown transformer malfunction in real time. It would have been heard afterwards during playback because Grady's amp was working fine; the problem was after the amp that everyone was hearing in the room."

That explains everything. Marty sounds calm because he is; he never even heard the malfunction – nobody did. With this newfound knowledge, I can finally finish the story: when the song ends, the band is called into the control room by Don Law. As they walk in and gather around the recording desk, Glen Snoddy rewinds the tape and hits play. The song jumps from the speakers as expected. Each member of the band listens to himself closely to be sure he's happy with his take. Suddenly, they hear a sound that shocks them all.

You see, like many of the great guitar inventions, this one wasn't on the schedule. It just happened. Invention can often be better defined as evolution – and this is the moment that everything popular music began to evolve into the rock revolution of the 60s.

In part three, we'll explore how this new sound went from an accident in the studio to a box on the shelves of music stores across the US – and how it landed in the hands of guitarists across the pond.

Join Josh for more pedal adventures at thejhsshow.com

© Don Cravens / Getty Images

THE SHOW MUST GO ON

Korina Gibsons, Jack White's guitar and all the best new gear from Music City as Summer NAMM returns to Nashville

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

In the two years since the Summer NAMM show last opened its doors at Nashville's Music City Center, the world has changed dramatically. But although it was a scaled-down event, with no mask mandate in place, walking around the first major North American musical instrument show since the start of the pandemic felt a lot like returning to the old 'normal'.

Not quite, though; some of the big hitters were conspicuous by their absence – not least Fender and pedal brands such as Keeley and JHS. And several guitar brands that did exhibit chose not to launch any new models, simply because they're still struggling to fulfil backorders generated by bumper sales in 2020. However, the show wasn't without its highlights…

GIBSON COLLECTOR'S EDITION 1958 FLYING V AND EXPLORER (1)

Gibson's presence at Music City Center was limited to a throne made from guitars designed to allow people to pose for selfies and indulge their inner gui-Targaryen. As the Gibson Garage is quite literally a stone's throw away, the Nashville company hosted its Summer NAMM events programme and product launches in the new facility.

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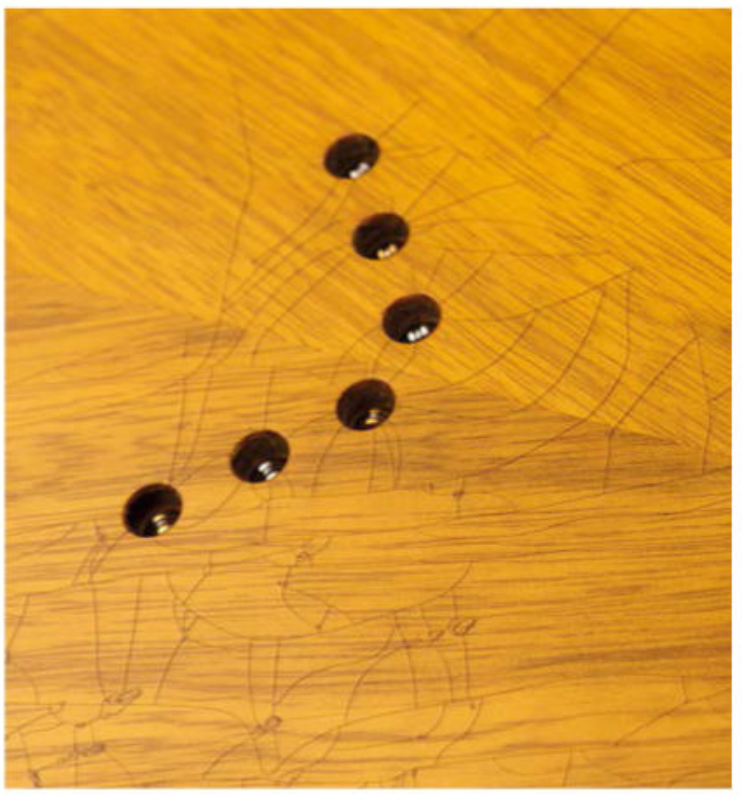

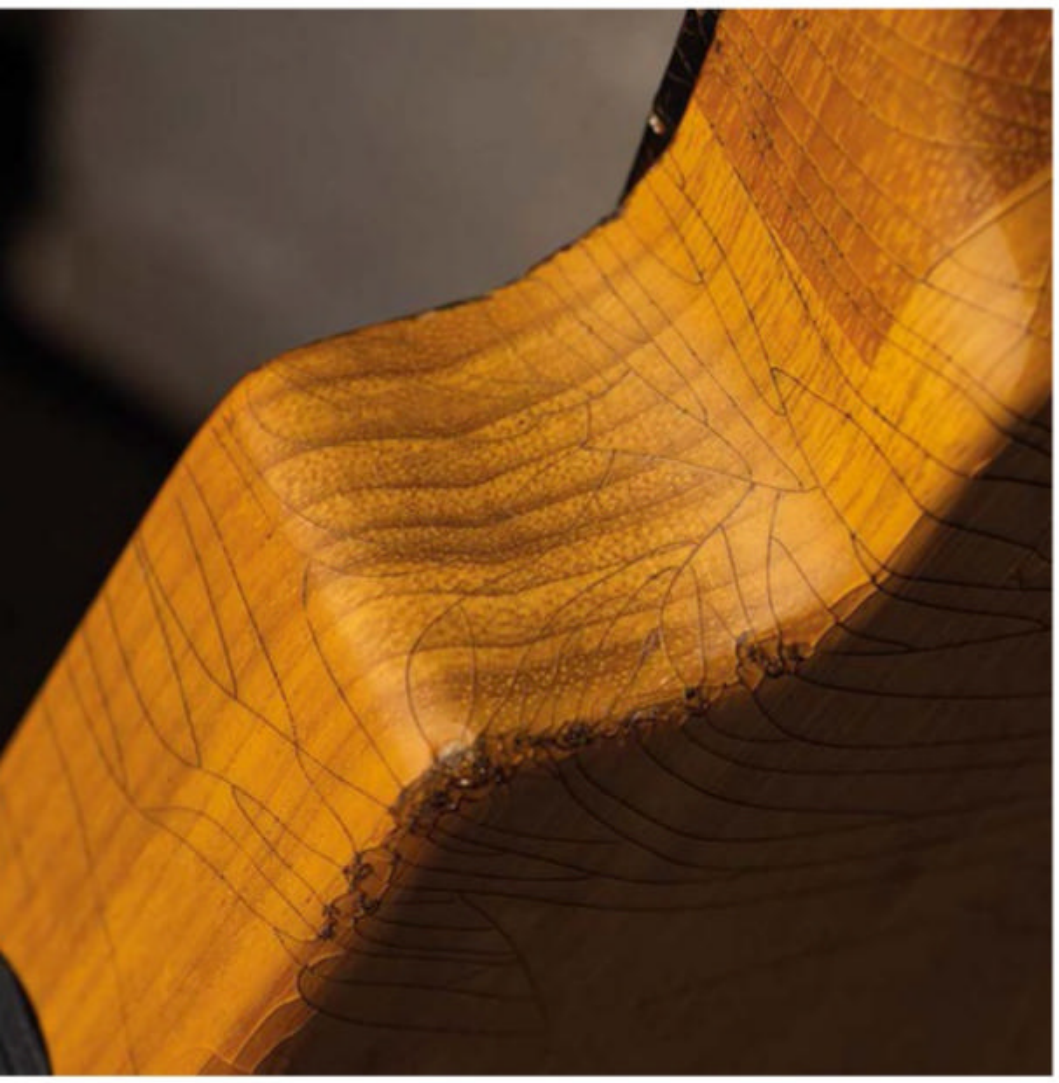

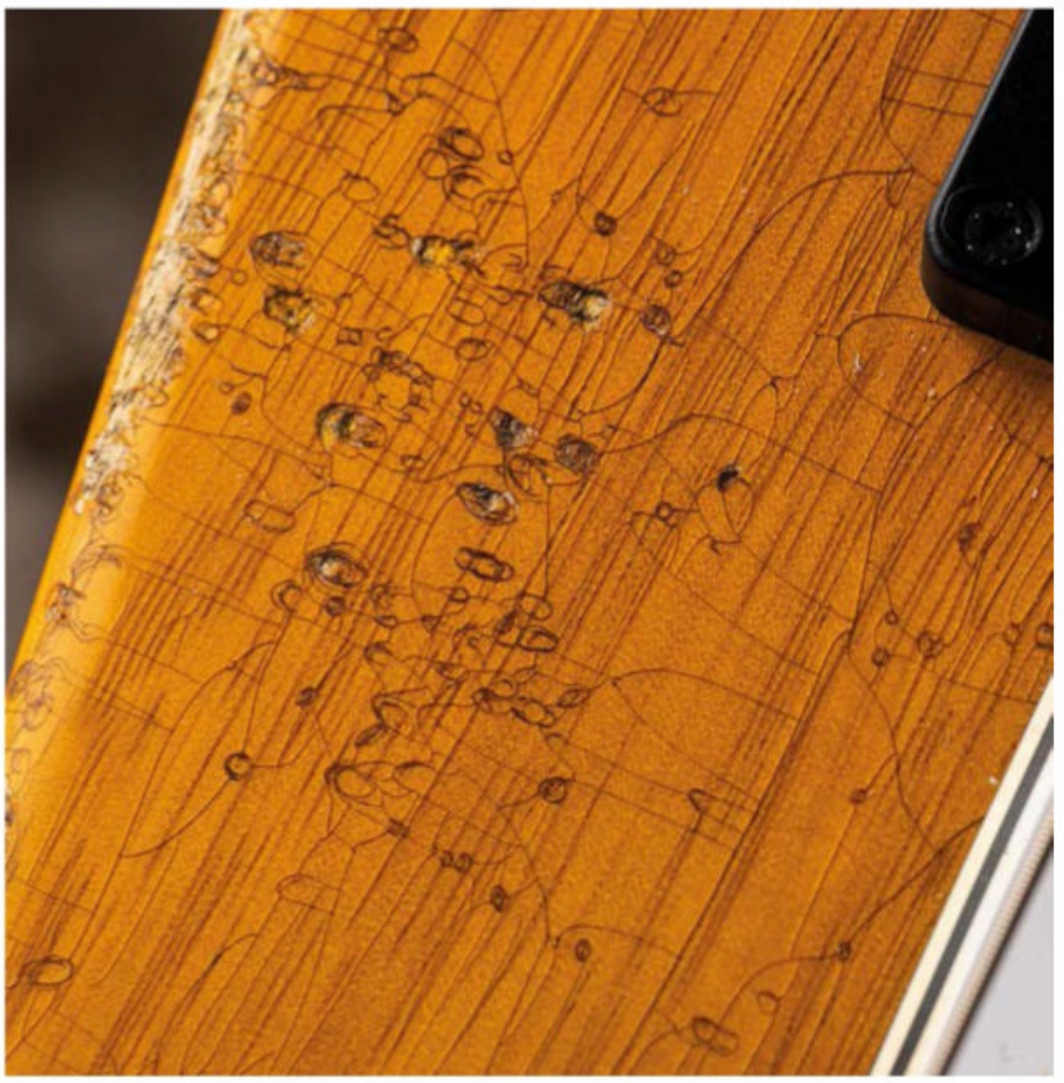

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Before the Garage opened to the public on day one of the show, we stopped by to check out the Custom Shop's painstaking recreations of the original korina Flying V and Explorer – including Brazilian rosewood 'boards and featuring Murphy Lab ageing. Just 19 Explorer and 81 Flying V models will be made, reflecting the number of instruments that shipped during their first year of production. Available in North America only, all the guitars sold within 30 minutes of going on sale for a cool $19,999 each. An extended worldwide run is apparently coming soon.

REVEREND GREG KOCH GRISTLE 90 (2)

Reverend's latest collaboration with Greg Koch is our favourite to date, with Fishman P-90 pickups accompanied by korina construction and a Bigsby tailpiece. It probably won't make you play quite as outrageously well as Mr Koch, but you'll certainly look and sound good while trying.

WILD CUSTOM GUITARS BILLY F GIBBONS SPECIAL (3)

Among the treasures on the Boutique Guitar Showcase stand was this new Billy Gibbons signature model featuring the innovative Gyrock rotating pickup system. Inspired by the ZZ Top star's hot-rodded 1934 Ford Coupe 'Whiskey Runner', the guitar is apparently "as bold and spicy as a Texas hot sauce". In the words of Gibbons himself, "Now to get down to thrashin' on this thing. Wooooooooweeeeee!"

EPIPHONE SLASH COLLECTION (4)

Epiphone's show sample of the Slash J-45 was sadly reduced to splinters en route to Tennessee but we did get to see a quintet of affordable new signature Les Pauls from the newly announced Epiphone Slash Collection. "Slash was intimately involved in every aspect of the development of his new Epiphone Collection," said Gibson brand president Cesar Gueikian. "We are all excited to see his fans around the world rock out with them!"

TAYLOR SCOOPS TWO BEST IN SHOW AWARDS (5)

The Californian company chose not to launch any new products at the show but it still scooped two of NAMM's coveted Best In Show awards. The TaylorSense guitar health monitoring system was a winner in the Best Add-On Or Accessory category, while the American Dream series was honoured as one of the overall Best In Show. Andy Powers was on hand to accept the awards.

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MARTIN UNVEILS NEW CEO (6)
Like Taylor, Martin chose to showcase existing models at Summer NAMM rather than launch a raft of new gear. New CEO Thomas Ripsam was in attendance and we sat down with him to find out about his lifelong passion for guitars and his plans for the future of the company. Stay tuned for our interview, coming soon.

IK MULTIMEDIA X-GEAR PEDALS (7)
The plugin wizards at IK Multimedia have moved into the hardware world with a quartet of new modelling units designed to share presets with the company's popular AmpliTube 5 SE software. The colour-coding of the enclosures appears to be a nod to Line 6's classic stompbox series that spawned the DL4, with distortion/overdrive, modulation, delay and reverb bases covered.

GIBSON ORIGINAL COLLECTION NON-REVERSE THUNDERBIRD (8)
Gibson has expanded its bass guitar range with the addition of this seriously drool-worthy four-string to its vintage-inspired Original Collection. Shown here in Sparkling Burgundy finish, it also comes in Inverness Green and Pelham Blue and is guaranteed to make you feel like a rockstar when strapped on.

D'ADDARIO XS STRINGS (9)
D'Addario is calling its new XS strings "the most innovative coated string ever created", and their performance has already drawn accolades from high-profile industry figures. With a coating that's ten times thinner than human hair, it's billed as a leap forward in coating technology that could be a game-changer for string life.

THIRD MAN HARDWARE (10)
Jack White's Third Man Records has become a Nashville institution and its Third Man Hardware imprint made its Summer NAMM debut in style, with an interactive stand replete with all the weird and wonderful yellow and black pedal collaborations that White has created with various boutique brands in recent years.

The real star of the stand, however, was the Copper Triple Jet electric owned and used by none other than Jack White himself. Built in 2006 by luthier Randy Parsons, the distinctive copper-topped instrument was available on the stand as a demo guitar for anyone at the show to pick up and play through the accompanying TMH rig. Consider our minds blown.

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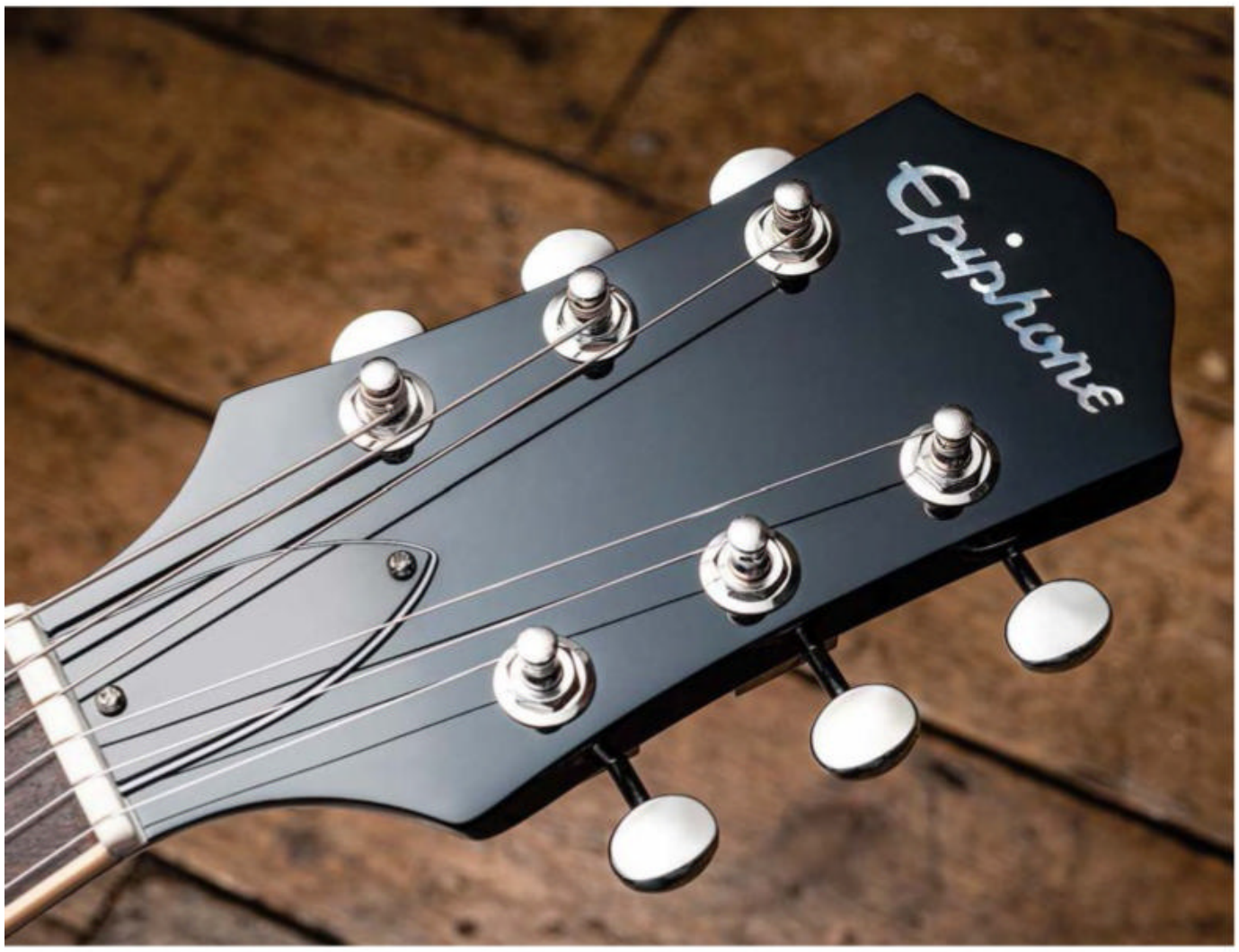

EPIPHONE
USA COLLECTION CASINO

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE

The Casino has been on more hit records than any other Epiphone design. Will this new USA model keep it at the top of the charts for decades to come?

Tony Bacon explores the illustrious history of the Epiphone Casino from p82 onwards but suffice to say, with all three guitar-playing Beatles using Casinos at the band's dazzling creative peak, the model's hall-of-fame status has long been assured. That said, like many feedback-prone hollowbody designs and its close cousin the Gibson ES-330, the Casino's popularity waned considerably in the 1970s and 80s when hair was long and stacks were loud and high.

These days, of course, stage volumes in most live venues are more conservative than ever before and, for a new breed of guitarists, the lion's share of public performances take place via social media. This makes hollowbody guitars more viable today than they have been at almost any time since the Epiphone Casino first rolled out of Kalamazoo in 1961. Then again, if you ask Casino players such as Gary Clark Jr, Barrie Cadogan or Teenage Fanclub's Raymond McGinley, they'll probably tell you that struggling to tame a hollowbody on the edge of feedback is all part of the fun, likewise battling with the Casino's 16th fret neck join.

Rather than aiming for a specific model year, the USA Collection Casino is something of a greatest hits compilation of desirable features. The Vintage Sunburst version comes with black plastic dogear pickup covers but our review model, in sumptuous Royal Tan gloss nitrocellulose with contrasting walnut-stained back and sides, comes with nickel covers. Visually, it's reminiscent of Paul Weller's famous guitar, which must be one of the best-looking Casinos of all.

The pickups under those nickel covers are Gibson USA P-90s. Just like the Gibson Original Collection ES-335 and ES-345 we reviewed recently – and which were built on the same Nashville production line – the wiring harness here has been wired by hand and features Orange Drop tone capacitors. The mahogany neck has the earlier short headstock design, and the body is made from three-ply maple/poplar/maple laminates with quartersawn spruce bracing and no centre block.

Before we plug in, the eagle-eyed among you may have spotted that the guitar's acrylic parallelogram inlays have been flipped horizontally when compared to the vintage design. This was intended as a subtle way to make this incarnation of Epiphone Casino visually distinct from others in the catalogue.

Under the bonnet: the hand-wired controls boast Orange Drop tone capacitors

High roller: we wish the 'board edges were rolled but the neck profile is perfect

Odds on: did you notice that the inlays have been flipped?

IN USE

The fingerboard binding is slightly thicker than we'd like and the 'board edges would be more welcoming if they were rolled but we soon forget all about that as the Casino's rounded C neck profile is just about perfect. Acoustically, there's a pleasing balance and longer sustain than some examples of its type and, when amplified, this translates into the kind of addictive white-knuckle ride that Casino and ES-330 devotees live for. The lack of height adjustment means that the pickups are set relatively low but there's still plenty of power and chime, and all the complexity that can make Gibson's humbucker-loaded semis sound a little safe and pedestrian in comparison.

The neck pickup dominates slightly but a few turns on each of the bridge pickup's pole screws helps redress the balance and only increases the nasal midrange honk that P-90 fans adore. Though the Casino is famed for pop jangle – and with good reason – one of its other great strengths is vintage soul and

Nickel and dime: the Gibson USA P-90 pickups feature nickel dogear covers

Royal flush: the Royal Tan sunburst really pops under stage lights

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £2,399 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION Hollowbody double-cutaway electric guitar, made in the USA
BUILD 3-ply maple/poplar/maple body with quartersawn spruce bracing and single-ply cream binding. Solid mahogany neck with bound 12" radius Indian rosewood fingerboard, acrylic parallelogram markers, 22 medium-jumbo frets, Graph Tech nut
HARDWARE Nickel ABR-1 bridge and trapeze tailpiece, Grover vintage-style tuners
ELECTRONICS 2x Gibson USA P-90 Dogear pickups, 2x volume, 2x tone
SCALE LENGTH 24.75"/629mm
NECK WIDTH 42.7mm at nut, 53.1mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22.1mm at first fret, 24.3mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.4mm at nut, 51.2mm at bridge
WEIGHT 2.8kg/6.3lb
LEFT-HANDERS Yes
FINISH Royal Tan gloss nitrocellulose (as reviewed), Vintage Sunburst
CONTACT epiphone.com

funk. Both the middle and neck positions provide a seriously infectious platform for choppy Curtis Mayfield and Leo Nocentelli grooves, and the neck pickup offers plenty of character for dynamic blues and jazz too.

In a shootout with our 1969 ES-330 (a long-neck model with a Bigsby), the Casino sounds clearer, with more air but less midrange snarl. To some extent we're comparing apples and oranges, as the Gibson's vibrato tailpiece, shimmed bridge pickup and 19th fret neck join make it a slightly different proposition. However, the modern guitar is no less expressive than the vintage instrument, and the USA Casino arguably offers even greater versatility thanks to its upper-harmonic presence and more hi-fi tonality. Depending on context, then, the old ones aren't always the best.

9/10 **More versatile than you think and more practical than ever, it's great to see the Casino back in the USA**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Vintage VSA500P Relssued **£449**
Eastman T64/v-T **£1,639**
Collings I-30 LC **£6,499**

CASINO ROYALE

The Epiphone Casino found its way into the hands of rock royalty at the very peak of their powers. Here's how this much-loved model was born

WORDS TONY BACON

With the recent launch of a made-in-USA Casino, Epiphone chose to mark an important 60th birthday in some style. The brand's original Casino was launched in 1961 as one of the models Gibson introduced following its acquisition of Epiphone, a company based for many years in New York City.

Gibson did the deal in 1957 to get at Epiphone's successful upright bass business, with the guitar lines an afterthought that happened to come along with the brand name. In fact, the basses never went well for Gibson and production was short-lived. As for the guitars, just look around – it's clear how well they've gone for Gibson.

In 1958, Gibson released the first of its new Epiphone-brand guitars, which had the effect of creating an ancillary tier to the Gibson lines. Some of these 'new' Epiphones continued the look and intention of existing Epi models, while others were Epi near-equivalents of Gibson models, with different pickups and varied feature sets so that there were still distinctions to separate the two brands. The Epiphone Casino fell into the second category and went into the catalogue alongside the similar if high-end Epiphone Sheraton, which had been introduced in 1959.

Gibson had recently introduced the ES-335, its groundbreaking semi-solid double-cutaway thinline electric. In the wake of the 335's success, the company's bosses created a series around it, adding a few more models in the same style. These were the stereo 345 and the high-end 355, as well as a full hollowbody version, the ES-330. They were quick to apply some of these approaches and ideas to the new Epiphone lines too.

Epiphone's semi-solid Sheraton (originally intended to be called the Deluxe) was roughly equivalent to the Gibson ES-355 in its fancy appointments, while the Casino was a close relation to Gibson's hollow ES-330. The Sheraton remained the only semi-solid among the Gibson-made Epiphones until it was joined in '62 by the Riviera, which broadly corresponded to the 335.

To understand how Gibson positioned the new Casino in its revised and reworked Epiphone range, let's consider the ES-330. The 330 was initially available with one or two pickups, and the October/November 1959 issue of the *Gibson Gazette* promo magazine announced the pair as "beautiful professional-type guitars, economy priced by Gibson". The blurb said they replaced the single-pickup thinline ES-225T, which explains why – for a while, at least – the 330 came in those single or double-pickup versions.

A further difference between the 330 and the semi-solid models was that the 330's neck was fitted further into the body. Unlike the 335, 345, and 355, the 330 had no solid block inside the body. As a result of the different fit, the 330's neck joined the body at about the 16th fret.

Mark and Colleen Hayward / Redferns / Getty Images

The ES-330 had a regular hollowbody-style trapeze tailpiece too, plus that choice of one or two single-coil P-90s, with two or four controls as appropriate. The single-pickup version didn't last long and was dropped in '63.

When the first examples of the Casino were shipped from the Gibson factory in Kalamazoo, Michigan, in 1961, the basic specs were all in place. Epiphone's catalogue from that year trumpeted the Casino as having "ultra-modern, thin-body, double cutaway styling". List prices for the single-pickup model were $230, or $269.50 with vibrato, and for the two-pickup model $275, or $314.50 with vibrato.

The body was about 16 inches at its widest and about an inch and three-quarters deep, and it had a pressed three-ply laminated top, back, and sides – maple for the two outer plies plus a softer inner ply, often poplar. Gibson used specialised presses to contour and arch the Casino's laminated tops and backs, and to shape the sides. This Epi body had the twin 335-style rounded cutaways, in this case leaving 16 frets clear of the body.

What the catalogue went on to call the "slim, fast low action neck" was one-piece mahogany, glued to the body with Gibson's standard mortise-and-tenon joint. A rosewood fingerboard was glued to the neck over a strengthening truss rod in its slot, and the scale length was Gibson's regular 24 3/4 inches.

Dot position markers were inlaid into the single-bound fingerboard, which had 22 frets, and there was a hard plastic nut at the top. Six Kluson Deluxe tuners were fitted to the headstock, each with a closed back and plastic oval button, and a plain black-topped plastic plate on the headstock covered the truss-rod adjustment point.

There were two finish options at launch: Royal Tan, an attractively pale orange-yellow sunburst, coupled with red-brown sides; and the more traditional-looking Shaded, essentially a dark sunburst with dark sides. There was single white plastic binding glued to the top and back edges of the body, and two traditional f-holes cut into the top.

Visible through the controls-side f-hole was Epiphone's pale blue label indicating 'Style' (Casino Dbl for two-pickup or Sgl for one-pickup), Epiphone model number (E-230TD for two-pickup thinline double or E-230T for single-pickup thinline), and 'No.' (serial number – "guarantee void if number is defaced").

The nickel-plated metalwork on the Casino included two strap buttons, at the neck heel and at the back edge of the body. Below the pickups was the pickguard, fixed to the body with two screws, one at the neck and another fixed to a metal bracket that was in turn screwed to the side of the body.

The bridge was a Gibson Tune-o-matic, and two P-90 pickups with black plastic dogear covers were in the regular neck and bridge locations. The optional single-pickup version had its P-90 centrally positioned. On the two-pickup model, standard Gibson wiring meant four 0-to-10 bonnet control knobs and a three-way switch with white tip in front of them, or just two knobs on the single-pickup variant. Both versions had a metal output socket to the rear of the controls.

Epiphone made changes throughout the Casino's first era, which lasted from its introduction in 1961 until 1970. For instance, some early examples feature Epiphone's older metal curving triangular badge at the headstock – but soon a pearloid Epiphone logo was in place at the tip.

Also evident on some early examples was a tortoise pickguard (which Epiphone called "shell celluloid"), but soon the model settled on a three-ply white-topped guard, both inlaid with the brand's stylish 'E' logo. At first there was a choice between a regular trapeze and Epiphone's Tremotone vibrato tailpiece, and sometimes Epi's Frequensator two-pronged tailpiece or a factory-fitted Bigsby.

Around the end of 1962, the fretboard inlays were changed from dots to offset diamonds (or "single parallelograms" in Gibson-speak), and the pickup covers were changed from black plastic to nickel-plated metal around 1963. Another finish option arrived in 1967 when Cherry replaced Royal Tan, which was about the same time the single-pickup was dropped, resulting in revised model suffixes: E-230TDVC thin body, double pickups, vibrato, Cherry; E-230TDV thin body, double pickups, vibrato, Shaded; E-230TDC thin body, double pickups, trapeze, Cherry; and E-230TD thin body, double pickups, Shaded.

Paul's 1962 model had the black knobs and Gibson-style headstock of the period, plus a Bigsby, while John and George's '65 models featured gold knobs and Epi's later flared-style head. George's came with a Bigsby, John's with the regular trapeze tailpiece. Later, George and John had the sunburst finish stripped from their Casinos to reveal the natural wood. George later said that he thought this improved the sound.

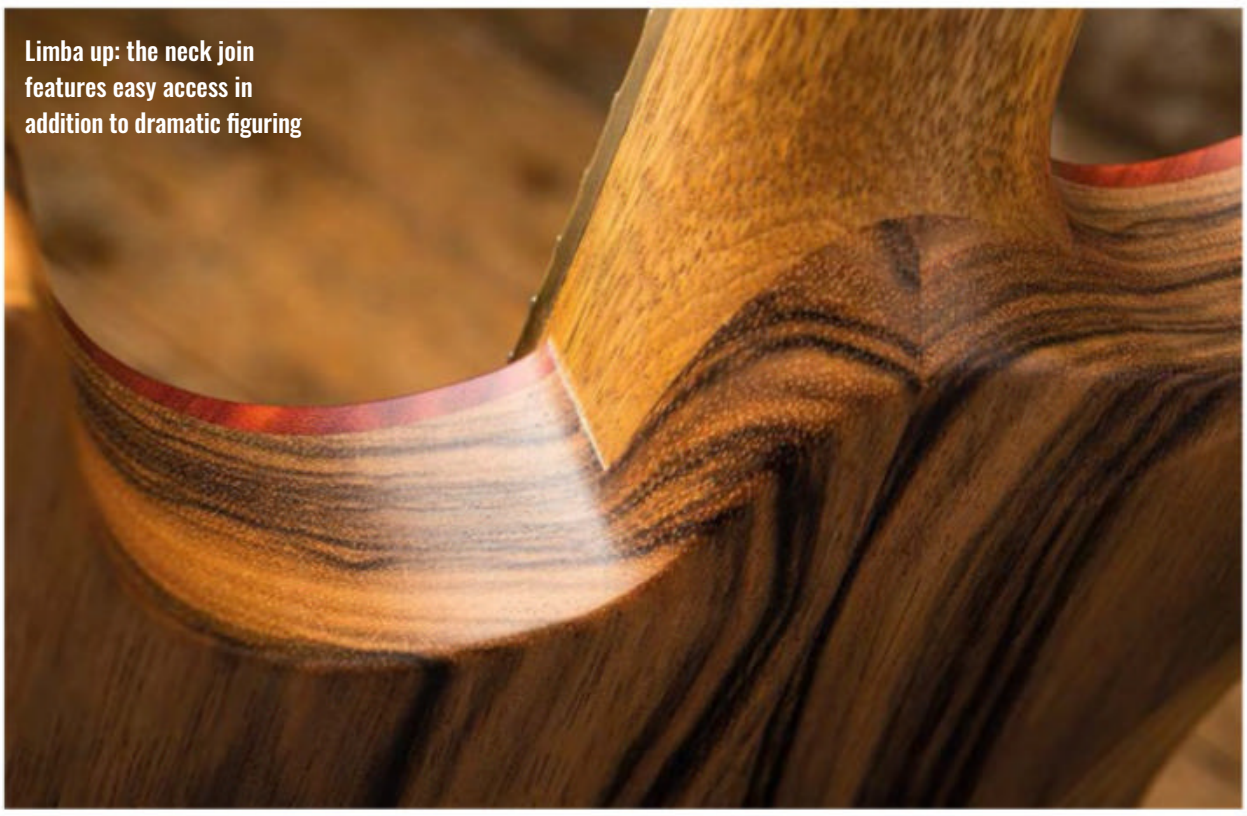
After its original demise in 1970, the Casino later reappeared, first as part of Epiphone's Japanese-made lines in the 80s and then more recently in many reissues, revisions and signature models, including a good number of Beatle-related models. In its 1960s heyday, however, it was a strong member of the Gibson-made Epiphone range, living up to the proud description in the launch-year catalogue, where the Casino was hailed as a "brilliant new guitar… dramatic in appearance and tonal qualities".

According to Gibson's shipping records, the best year for the Casino in terms of sales was 1967, when a total of 1,814 left the factory, up from an early low in 1963 of 376. After 1968, the figures tumbled to 140 in '69 and just 11 in the first era's final year, 1970. It's hard to resist coming to the conclusion that the doubling of sales from 1965 (853) to 1966 (1,655) was down to the Beatles effect. In 1966 the band played their final tour dates – including the very last Beatles concert at Candlestick Park in San Francisco that August – with George and John each brandishing a Casino as their main stage guitar.

The Beatles-Casino liaison had begun at the end of 1964, when Paul – remember he started out in the band as a guitarist – bought himself a Casino, which he restrung and played 'upside down' to accommodate his left-handed style. He recalled later that a discussion with John Mayall influenced his decision to get the Epi. The year after Paul's acquisition, John and George bought their own Casinos, and all three used them on the sessions for *Revolver*.

"GEORGE AND JOHN HAD THE SUNBURST FINISH STRIPPED FROM THEIR CASINOS. GEORGE SAID HE THOUGHT THIS IMPROVED THE SOUND"

Head honcho: B3 is helmed by former Fender Custom Shop man Gene Baker



Limba up: the neck join features easy access in addition to dramatic figuring

B3 GUITARS
ULTRAMODERN 22

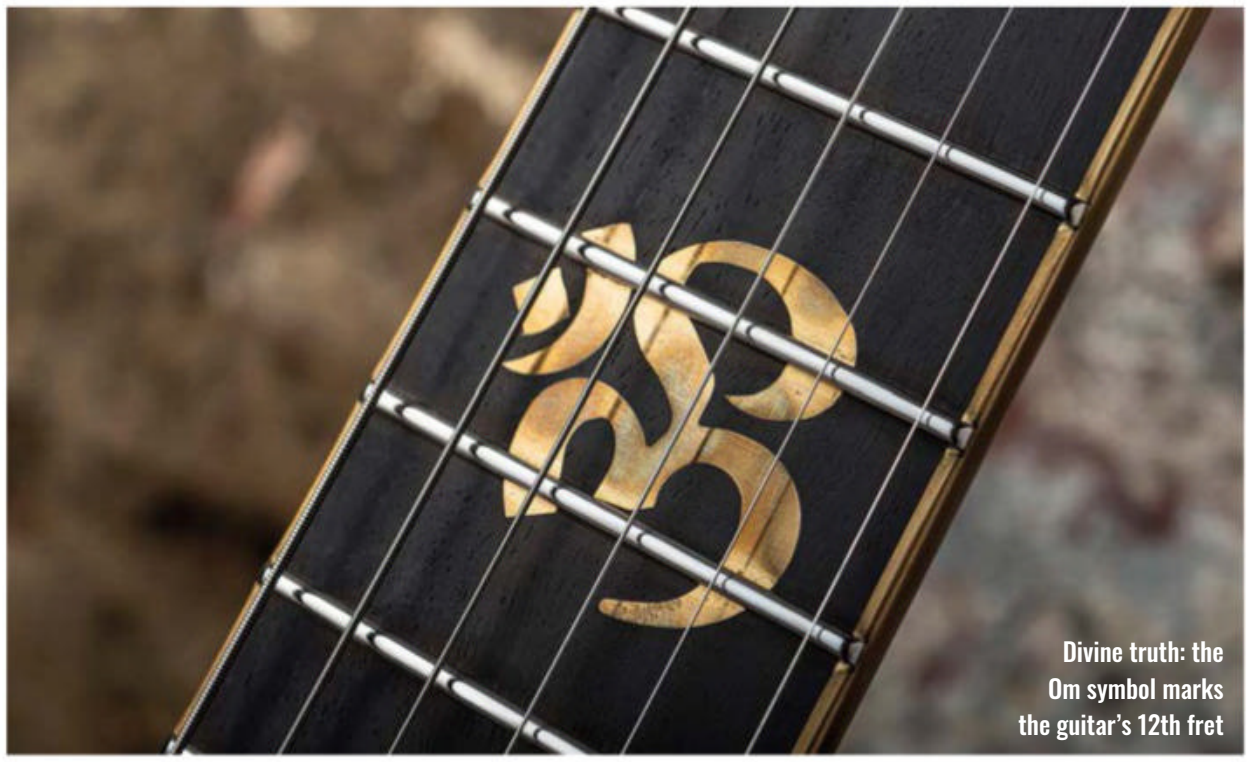
WORDS DARRAN CHARLES

Fender Custom Shop legend Gene Baker forges ahead with a modern design that's much more than a shred guitar

The name may be unfamiliar to some but Gene Baker, the luthier behind the B3 brand, will be known to many as the former Fender Custom Shop Master Builder who went on to helm his own company and produce fine double-cut instruments, including a Robben Ford signature model. Now, Baker's newly rejuvenated B3 brand offers truly custom-built guitars, with each instrument beginning with a chosen silhouette, neck type (bolt-on, neck through or set) and either front or rear-loaded electronics. From there, the options are limited only by the scope of your imagination.

Our review model has been spec'd by UK store Coda Music, and the guys at Coda have selected an African tonewood base: a black limba body and neck, with a figured bubinga body cap. Black limba is also known to guitarists as korina, while bubinga has a reddish-bronze colouring and much in common tonally with Indian rosewood. The fretboard is ebony and, unusually, both the binding and inlays are polished brass.

We haven't encountered a Sophia 2:22 vibrato bridge before but its precision build quality and sheer sturdiness help emphasise further this guitar's no-expense-spared feel. The bridge's various engineering accomplishments are too extensive to get into here but one of its most interesting features is that it gives players the ability to perform doublestop bends while retaining



Divine truth: the Om symbol marks the guitar's 12th fret

Fine grains: bubinga and black limba is an attractive combination

the pitch of adjacent unbent strings, negating one of the biggest disadvantages of the conventional floating vibrato.

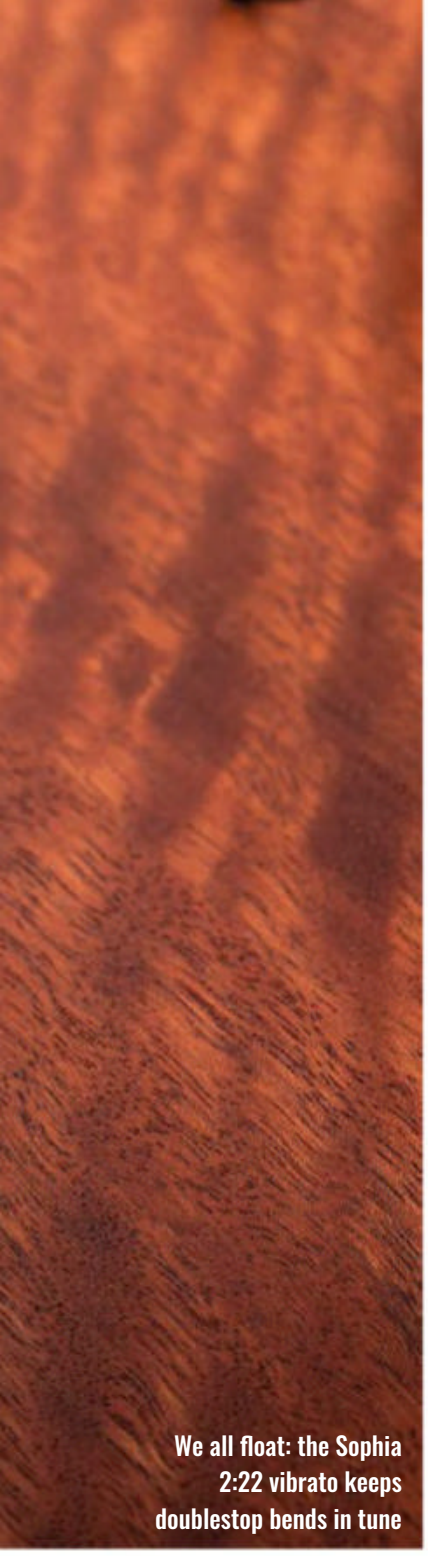
Another notable feature of the bridge is the Global Tuner. Floyd Rose owners will have doubtless experienced their entire guitar being pulled out of tune if the bridge's position in relation to the guitar's body has been impacted (usually caused by climatic change). The Global Tuner is able to compensate for this by allowing adjustment of the entire bridge via a rear thumbwheel, which returns the bridge back to its original position and the strings back to pitch.

IN USE

The neck carve on this particular instrument is a large C profile, whose girth increases along its length to provide support to the underside of the fretting hand, where it is arguably most required. It's certainly no artless baseball bat but the neck does sport a surprising thickness for a guitar that appears ostensibly to be aimed at shredders. For our money, though, it's a pleasant

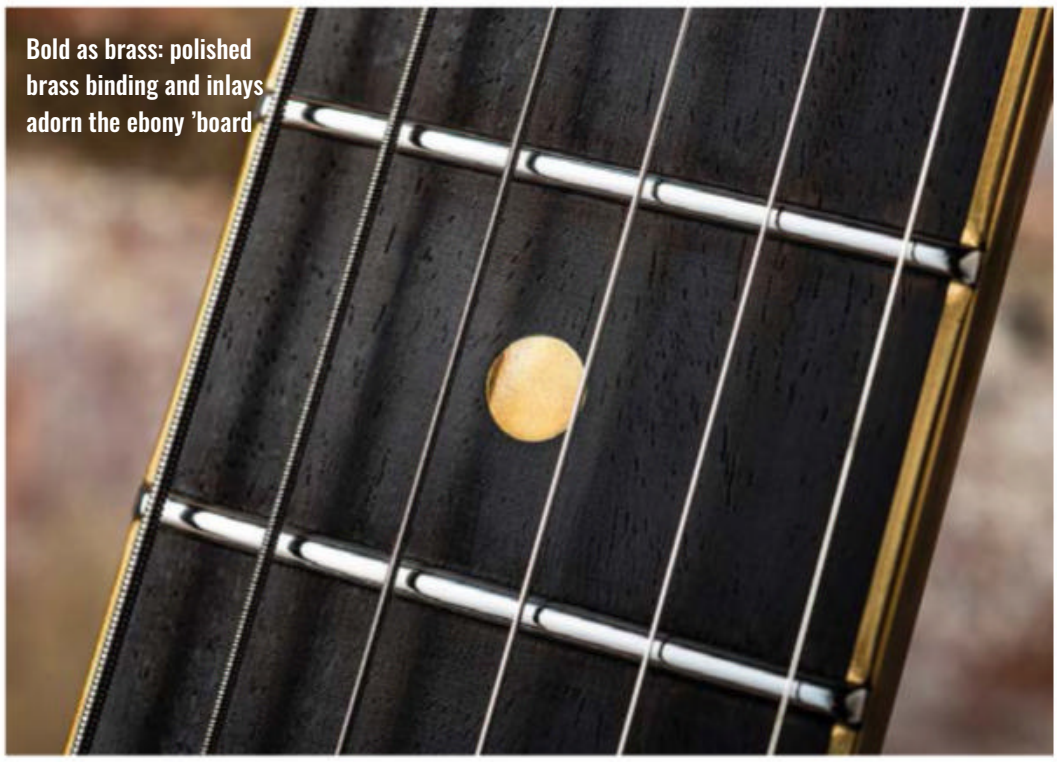
KEY FEATURES

PRICE £5,799 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION 6-string double-cutaway electric guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Black limba body with figured bubinga top, set bubinga neck with brass-bound 12" radius ebony fretboard, 22 stainless steel frets
HARDWARE Sperzel locking tuners, Sophia 2:22 vibrato bridge
ELECTRONICS 2x Fishman Fluence Open Core Classic humbuckers, 3-way blade pickup selector, 2x mini-toggle voice switches, master volume and tone
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 43.57mm at nut, 52.14mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20.85mm at 1st fret, 27.54mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 54.11mm at bridge, 36.21mm at nut
WEIGHT 3.6kg/7.94lb
LEFT-HANDERS Yes (see website)
FINISHES Natural (as reviewed, see website for custom options)
CONTACT coda-music.com, b3guitars.com



We all float: the Sophia 2:22 vibrato keeps doublestop bends in tune

Change it up: the Fluence switching options ensure a wide variety of tones



Bold as brass: polished brass binding and inlays adorn the ebony 'board

surprise and seems to complement almost any style we throw at it.

Predictably, The Fishman Fluence Open Core Classics here prove slightly less powerful than the Modern counterparts we tested recently. But that's no bad thing. Set to their default position (voice two) via individual mini-toggles, they perform here like overwound vintage humbuckers.

The limba body's bright midrange brings a satisfying bite to proceedings, which works well for overdriven riffs, and of course, the trademark clarity of the Fishman units means there's no shortage of high-end and definition. This is also the case with voices one and three, which offer vintage-style PAF tones and wiry single-coil voices, respectively.

Despite the UltraModern moniker, the guitar's huge neck and HD take on vintage tones cater to a much wider demographic than your common or garden shred machine. Extravagant materials, posh hardware and lofty price tag aside, this Gene Baker design is very much a modern player's guitar rather than a luxury item for the well-heeled. There are one or two minor cosmetic issues that you perhaps wouldn't expect to find for the money but, overall, in the often retro-obsessed world of boutique solidbody guitars, we applaud Baker's efforts to push things forward. G

8/10 **An interesting and forward-thinking take on the modern doublecut**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Tom Anderson Drop Top from **£3,800**
Suhr Modern Pro **£2,999**
PRS Custom 22 **£3,549**

GRETSCH
Bigsby

Broad shoulders: the G2410TG features a pair of Broad'Tron humbuckers

Get set: a tortoise 'guard complements the Village Amber finish

Hump day: the laurel fingerboard boasts humped block inlays

GRETSCH
G2410TG STREAMLINER

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

This latest entry in Gretsch's boundary-stretching Streamliner series is slimmed down in build but beefed up in sound – is it a recipe for hollowbody heaven?

The tagline for Gretsch's Streamliner series is 'brave new sound', so you might well be a little confused by the oh-so-familiar look of the fully hollow G2410TG. That is, until you look at it side-on.

The 'G' denotes gold hardware but the chief difference between this 2021 guitar and the G2420T that we reviewed back in 2019 is that the archtop body is half an inch skinnier, at 2.25 inches at the edges instead of 2.75. Combine that with the punchy Broad'Tron BT-2S humbuckers and we could be closer to a thinline Gibson than a traditional Gretsch twang-box here.

This guitar is still much more of a handful than a 1.75-inch Gibson ES though, and most of its key features, from the double-bound single-cutaway shape to the Bigsby-licensed tailpiece and wood-mounted bridge, remain very much in the 6120 tradition.

Completing this Streamliner's 'lounge bar on the Titanic' look is a natural amber finish complemented by smart purfling, plus a tidy faux tortoiseshell pickguard and humped pearloid fret markers, as well as four controls – master volume and tone, plus individual pickup volumes – in a black-tinted clear plastic that detracts only slightly from the overall vibe of luxury.

IN USE

A 'thin U' carve and a 12-inch fretboard radius combine to make the G2410TG's neck feel wider than it actually is – the prominent shoulders mean that it fills the hand nicely while playing open chords. And higher up? Well, you won't be going very high: the heel starts around the 11th fret and access to anything above the 18th requires telescopic fingers.

Strong and stable: the Adjusto-Matic bridge sits on a secured laurel base

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £609
DESCRIPTION 6-string hollowbody electric guitar, made in Indonesia
BUILD Arched single-cutaway fully hollow maple laminate body, set nato neck with 12" radius bound laurel fingerboard, pearloid hump block inlays, 22 medium jumbo frets and synthetic bone nut
HARDWARE Adjusto-Matic bridge on secured laurel base, Bigsby B60 vibrato, die-cast tuners, all gold-finished
ELECTRONICS 2x Broad'Tron BT-2S humbucking pickups, master volume and tone plus individual volume controls, three-way pickup switch
SCALE LENGTH 24.75"/629mm
NECK WIDTH 42.8mm at nut, 53.9mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22.1mm at first fret, 23.9mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 35mm at nut, 51.5mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.1kg/6.8lb
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISH Village Amber (as reviewed), Ocean Turquoise, Single Barrel
CONTACT gretschguitars.com

Clean lines: a simple Gretsch logo adorns the bound headstock

The relatively shallow body brings a more brash and middly acoustic voice than a full-size Grestch but it's not unpleasant. DC resistance readings of about 9k for both pickups, meanwhile, make it clear they're not low-output Filter'Trons in disguise.

An amp soon confirms that. If sparkly treble is your favourite feature of Gretsch guitars, move along; there's nothing for you here. Like the two Streamliner models with FideliSonic 90 pickups that we reviewed in June, this is all about the chunky midrange.

There's plenty of vintage twang on the bridge pickup, though. This is no shredding machine but for rock 'n' roll riffage it has all the attitude you need – and it'll take more gain than you might expect. The lack of centre-block means you're never far away from the next feedback squall but it's not as uncontrollable as some deeper-bodied types – and, of course, with a little help from the Bigsby, those howls can be harnessed to create a whole other kind of music.

The neck pickup is pure jazz, warm and whumpy even with the tone control wide open, while the middle setting keeps the low end full but introduces some phasey colour in a way that begs for arpeggios. In theory there are more pickup blends to be explored by turning down one volume control or the other; in practice, the tapers are so all-or-nothing that this doesn't quite happen.

This isn't a guitar for the rockabilly purist, then, and nor is it a slinky blues machine. But if you're eyeing up a space between the two, the G2410TG might just fill it. G

8/10 **An interesting option for anyone who likes the classic Gretsch look but wants meatier tones**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Epiphone Emperor Swingster **£699**
Eastman Romeo LA **£1,499**
Godin 5th Avenue Uptown Custom **£1,810**

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BOURGEOIS LEGACY SERIES 000 DB SIGNATURE DELUXE

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

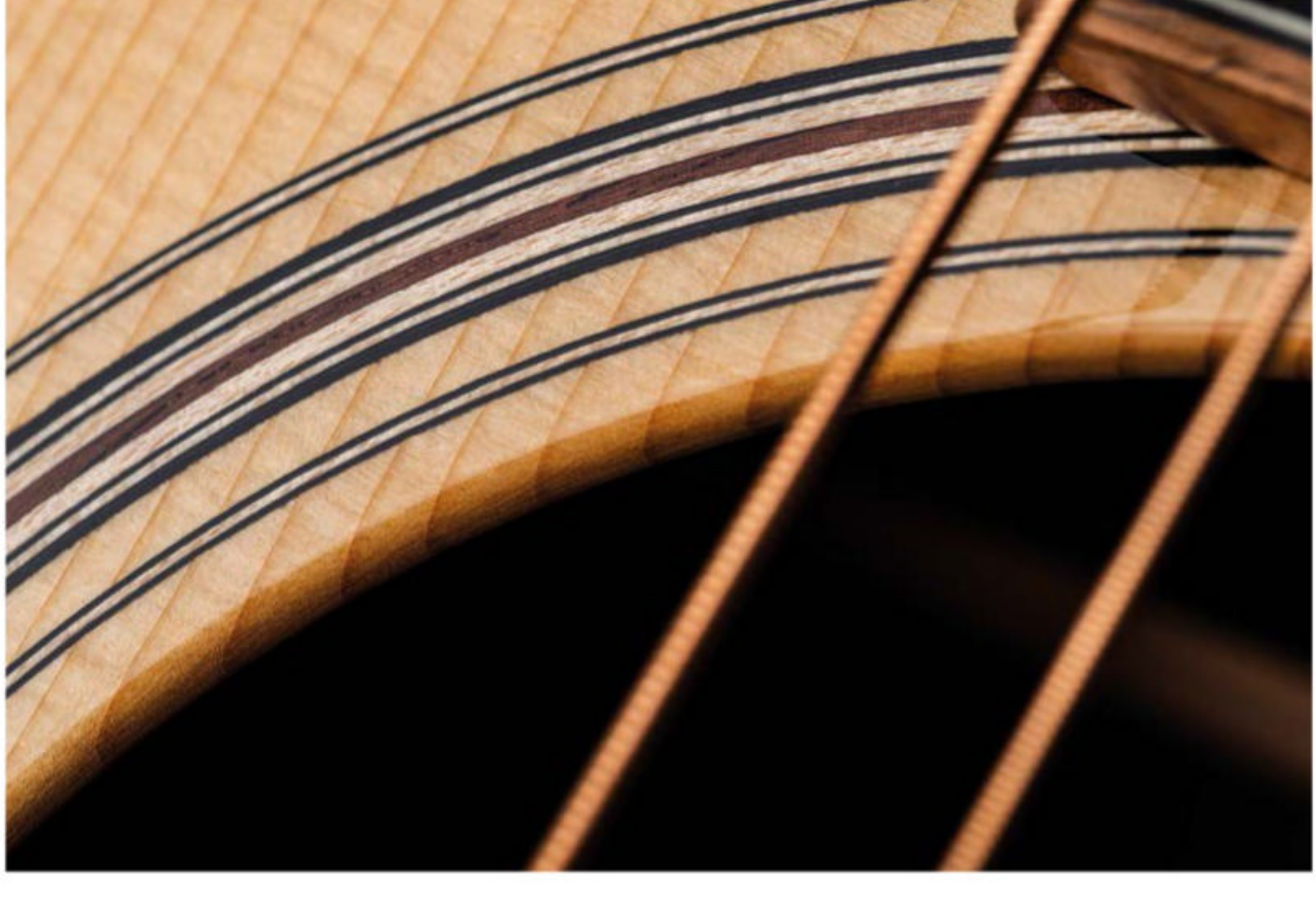
WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Hand-built in Maine, this fabulous instrument might just be the high-water mark for 000-style acoustics

Since his humble beginnings in a one-man shop in 1977, Dana Bourgeois has garnered – and, more importantly, maintained – a reputation for making high-performance acoustic guitars based on iconic Martin designs, only with an in-depth approach to voicing that has come to define the Bourgeois sound. Now at the helm of a 20-strong team that creates 400 instruments per year, Bourgeois is an established name that caters to acoustic connoisseurs on the lookout for something very special indeed.

Two for one: two-tone herringbone purfling frames the Adirondack spruce top

Side order: bone side markers sit neatly in the fretboard's koa binding



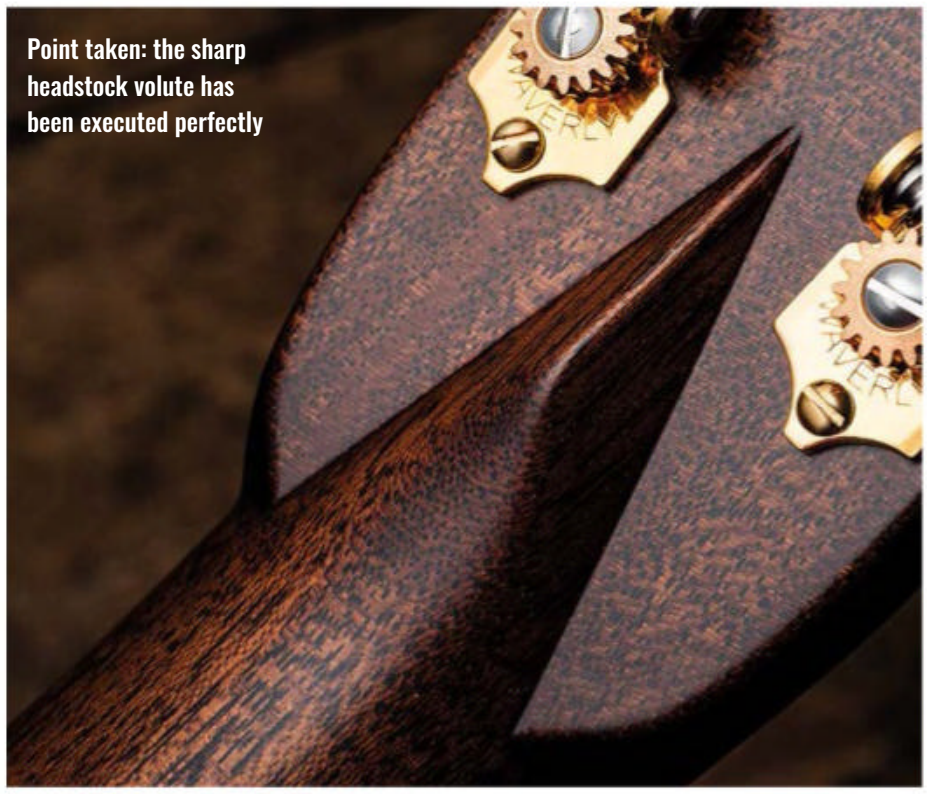
Ring true: Bourgeois' understated rosette adorns the soundboard

Bourgeois offers guitars at a range of price points but this beautiful instrument, which purrs as we remove it from its snug TKL case, is a 000 DB Signature Deluxe model that boasts top-end specs chosen by Dana himself. Lovers of Bourgeois guitars may well be familiar with the DB Signature line but this one turns things up a notch. It is the Deluxe model, after all.

The first thing we notice is that, with the exception of the celluloid pickguard, a barely-there ivoroid fretboard coach line, and the subtle use of bone for the 'board inlays, bridge pins and side-position markers, everything on the body of this guitar is made from wood – there is no plastic binding or purfling here. Instead, this guitar is bound with outrageously figured Hawaiian koa, which adds a deep chatoyance to the edges of the body, fingerboard and headstock. This is accompanied by two-tone herringbone soundboard purfling, and it's an elegantly judged combination with neither feature distracting from the other.

Typical of the vintage-meets-modern approach characteristic of Bourgeois, this instrument features a torrefied Adirondack spruce soundboard that has been entirely hand-voiced. This is a particularly attractive slice of wood with gorgeous winter-growth lines and just a touch of bear claw on the edges. A gentle tap behind the bridge reveals a lively sweet spot, which bodes well.

The back and sides are made from Madagascar rosewood, often referred to as Mad Rose. This is a rare and desirable



Point taken: the sharp headstock volute has been executed perfectly

Open for business: the open-back tuners boast snakewood buttons

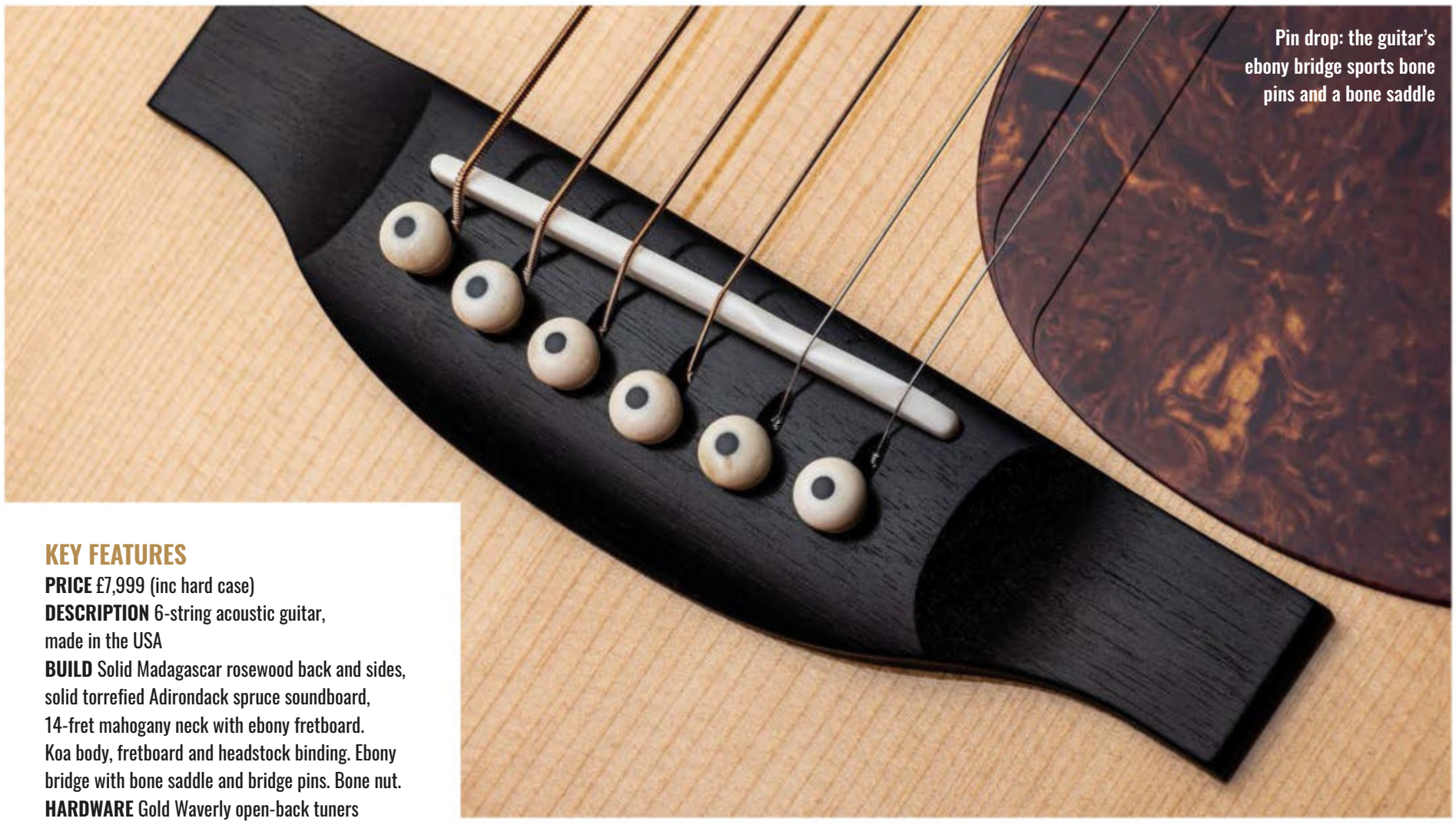
Landing strip: the rosewood body features a beautiful marquetry back strip

Dalbergia that should not be thought of as a substitute for Brazilian rosewood – we're well past that now. Of note is the elegant set used for the back of the guitar, which is strongly figured with a flash of golden sapwood and neatly bisected and accentuated by the signature Bourgeois marquetry back strip. It's a very good look.

The one-piece 14-fret mahogany neck is slim with a hint of a vintage V-carve, and looks inviting from the shapely heel to the sharp volute. Tuning duties are taken care of by a set of gold Waverlys that boast snakewood buttons (but of course), and the nut and saddle are bone that's been superbly shaped and polished.

In another canny marriage of vintage and contemporary construction techniques, the guitar was created using animal protein glue throughout, and the high-gloss finish comes in the form of Bourgeois' super-thin Aged Tone cyanoacrylic formula, which aims to replicate the response of an instrument that has been through decades of playing. The back of the neck, meanwhile, features a satin sheen to ensure quick and squeak-free operation.

Although the body size is identical to an OM, this instrument features a shorter 25-inch scale length. Having experienced the magic of multiple vintage 000s over the years, we're expecting a slightly warmer and more complex voice but with the whip-crack response characteristic of a smaller soundboard than you'd find on a jumbo or dreadnought.



Pin drop: the guitar's ebony bridge sports bone pins and a bone saddle

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £7,999 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION 6-string acoustic guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Solid Madagascar rosewood back and sides, solid torrefied Adirondack spruce soundboard, 14-fret mahogany neck with ebony fretboard. Koa body, fretboard and headstock binding. Ebony bridge with bone saddle and bridge pins. Bone nut.
HARDWARE Gold Waverly open-back tuners with snakewood buttons
ELECTRONICS None
SCALE LENGTH 25"/635mm
NECK WIDTH 44.7mm at nut, 56mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22mm at first fret, 23.5mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 38.9mm at nut, 59.7mm at bridge
WEIGHT 2.25kg/4.9lb
LEFT-HANDERS POA
FINISH Aged Tone super-thin high gloss cyanoacrylic (body) satin (neck)
CONTACT coda-music.com, bourgeoisguitars.com

Hip to be square: the bound headstock is another example of understated elegance

IN USE

Traditionally, 000 models have found favour as instruments to accompany vocals and, with this in mind, we kick off with a light pick and some of the expensive open ninth chords that are so beloved of tasteful songwriters. The results are delicious. This guitar has an immediate response and, while on other instruments the combination of Adirondack over Mad Rose can veer towards spikier transients, in this case we get a silky attack that blooms into a long, smooth and musical decay, demanding just a touch of vibrato to bring out the overtones.

Digging in with the pick reveals both a lot of headroom and a surprisingly wide dynamic range. There's a magic to the notes when driven hard – a near perfect balance of focus and articulation with warmth and soul – and even the most gentle of strums sounds rich and characterful.

Dropping into Orkney tuning (CGDGCD) from a standing start can be a shock for any guitar but the Bourgeois takes the downward shift in its stride. There may not be the tectonic bass response of a C-tuned jumbo but what you do get is far more useable. It's an articulate and beautiful voice that responds immediately to a variety of hand positions and attacks.

Due to the scarcity of the woods used in the production of this instrument, as well as the quality of the build and the corresponding price tag, the DB Signature Deluxe is unlikely to become a first-choice acoustic for heavy touring. However, drawn by its captivating acoustic voice, we set up a spaced pair of Gefell M300 microphones to test its potential as a recording instrument. The results are superbly detailed. No studio wizardry is required to make it sound top-drawer – it already does.

In this golden age of acoustic guitar-making there are several different schools of sonic excellence, from the orchestral textures of the Bay Area to the wild steel of Northumbria, and the Martin sound is by no means the final word in superlative acoustic performance. This Legacy Series 000 DB Signature Deluxe, however, is a ravishing example of that vintage Nazarene voice. Perhaps the final indication of just how engaging this instrument can be is that by the time we lovingly pack it up for its return to Coda Music, the strings are all but dead and we've written several new songs. It was a genuine pleasure.

10/10 **Very possibly the best in class when it comes to vintage-style 000 models**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Atkin Essential 000 Aged **£2,899**
Martin 000-42 reimagined **£5,499**
Froggy Bottom H14 Custom from **$12,095**

THE MAINE MAN

With so many exciting things happening at his company's workshop, we couldn't resist a chat with Dana Bourgeois

The DB Signature line has been going for many years now. Can you tell us how it came about?

"It came from a desire to do a modern take on a traditional instrument. A lot of the custom requests we've had have been for wooden binding. This Signature Deluxe 000 has Hawaiian koa binding on the fingerboard and headstock, as well as the body. I also reserve my best sets of Madagascar rosewood for this line. I prefer to see a bit of sapwood too.

"I guess the initial idea with the DB Signature concept was to bring in some luthier-developed ideas that we wouldn't use on more basic lines. Over the years we have done plenty of signature models for players like Bryan Sutton and Martin Simpson. In this case, the luthier is the signature artist! Of course the line has evolved over the years – we started off with a curly maple binding, for instance – but as we started using torrefied woods, which are darker in colour, we found that the koa just looked better."

Under the hood, our review guitar is a very traditional 000.

"The DB signature line is an opportunity for me to get creative, especially with the Deluxe models. There is no such thing as a 'regular' version but each one is very much a Bourgeois. This guitar has the full Aged Tone package too, of course. That consists of a torrefied Adirondack top, animal-protein glue and the Aged Tone finish, which is a propriety finish that we developed at around the same time that we started using torrefied wood.

"Nitrocellulose lacquer can take up to 20 years to fully cure and, as it does so, the guitar tends to sound a little bit better as it breaks in. Nitro starts off very soft and it has a dampening effect on a guitar's voice. We've found a super-thin hard finish sounds better from the get-go, and that's what we use now."

Bourgeois Guitars is recognised as a pioneer in the use of torrefied woods for acoustics. How did that start?

"I can't remember exactly when that was… maybe six or seven years ago. A Canadian wood supplier had torrefied a number of spruce tops and then sent samples out to every major American guitar builder. We immediately made a couple of guitars from the wood and really liked them.

"My whole approach has been dedicated to emulating the response and sound of a vintage guitar with a new instrument. I thought at the time that every company would jump on this, it just worked so well. So we built a bunch of torrefied spruce guitars for the next NAMM show and turned up in Anaheim expecting to see torrefied wood everywhere – but to our surprise, we were the only ones! But, of course, now, years later, you can see them everywhere.

"I should say that torrefied woods had already been used for quite a while in the electric-guitar world. Music Man use torrefied necks, Juha Ruokangas has used these woods for at least a decade, Roger Sadowsky too. But, like everything, it takes a while for these pioneering techniques to filter into the mainstream. These days about half of our guitars have torrefied tops."

You're known for your detailed approach to voicing acoustic instruments. Does that approach change when using a torrefied soundboard?

"Everyone has their own system of voicing but my approach has always been to build a top within a certain range of flexibility while getting as many different tap tones as possible, rather than having one big tap tone which dominates the soundboard. I find this produces a more balanced guitar.

"I'm looking for good string-to-string and, if possible, good note-to-note balance. The big change is that a torrefied top will give you so many different resonant responses that you actually have to pick and choose what to accentuate and what to attenuate. We've done so many of them now, of course, that it's become second nature to us, and we're able to produce guitars with a full, rich sound every time. We're very proud of them!"

Visit bourgeoisguitars.com for more

Epiphone

Cloud nine: a mother-of-pearl cloud inlay adorns the headstock

EPIPHONE
USA COLLECTION FRONTIER

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE

Its aesthetics may nod to the Old West but Epiphone's wild Frontier is an American-made acoustic that's at home on the modern stage

Launched earlier this year, the new USA incarnation of the Epiphone Frontier is built in Gibson's dedicated acoustic facility in Bozeman, Montana, and harks back to the most desirable Frontier models from 1962 to 1965. The FT-110's roots in the Epiphone catalogue actually stretch right back to 1942 but, in 1958, production was relocated from New York to Kalamazoo following Gibson's acquisition of the Epiphone brand. Specification changes soon followed at Ted McCarty's behest.

Featuring an eye-catching lariat and cactus design engraved on an enlarged pickguard, at first glance the Frontier seems to have much in common with other Gibson acoustics of the period, such as the Hummingbird. However, the combination of a 25.5-inch scale length, square shoulders and flame maple back and sides most closely resembles another Gibson acoustic, the Dove, which debuted in 1962.

The new USA Collection Frontier features neither the adjustable-saddle bridge of the 1960s nor the Dove's tune-o-matic. Instead, we get the arguably more toneful arrangement of a bone saddle and belly-up Indian rosewood bridge. Though it's also available with a three-tone sunburst finish, this Antique Natural review model is our pick of the pair. The perfectly buffed gloss nitrocellulose enhances the look of both the Sitka spruce grain and the maple's almost holographic figuring. It's a beautiful instrument today but we'd love to see it again a few years down the line, when the boxfresh appearance has mellowed.

The top and back are framed by multi-ply cream and black binding, while the top bracing is hand-scalloped to avoid robbing the soundboard of flexibility, and internal construction is neat and clean. The older-style short headstock design features a mother-of-pearl 'cloud' inlay and sits atop a mahogany neck. This is attached to the body with a compound dovetail joint set with hot hide glue, and the bound rosewood fingerboard features slotted rectangle markers and Gibson's medium 'Legend' fretwire.

It may have a premium price tag but the USA Frontier comes optimised for the stage with an endpin jack connector, strap button at the heel and LR Baggs VTC electronics. Volume and tone controls are mounted unobtrusively at the bass side of the soundhole, while an integrated preset compression circuit operates below 400Hz.

IN USE

The neck's medium C carve has perhaps a touch more shoulder than some of the inviting vintage-style profiles elsewhere in the Gibson catalogue but it's certainly not off-putting, and anyway, neck-shape preference is an intensely personal thing. While we have no complaints about the fretwork and binding nibs, it would be nice to see the fretboard edges rolled over, especially for thumb-over styles. However, on the flipside, the spacious 44.1mm nut width offers more than enough real estate for precision fingering.

The quintessential Gibson recipe of spruce top, mahogany back and sides, round shoulders and a 24.75-inch scale (or thereabouts) delivers one of the most familiar sounds in popular music history.

Cowboy chords: the pickguard features a Western-inspired lariat and cactus design

Slot machine: slotted rectangle inlays decorate the 'board

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £3,619 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION 6-string acoustic guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Solid Sitka spruce top with scalloped X-bracing, solid figured maple back and sides, mahogany neck with compound dovetail joint set with hot hide glue, Indian rosewood fingerboard with 12" radius, mother-of-pearl slotted rectangle inlays and 20 medium frets, bone nut, Indian rosewood bridge with bone saddle and Tusq bridge pins
HARDWARE Gold Gotoh keystone tuners
ELECTRONICS LR Baggs VTC undersaddle pickup, soundhole-mounted volume and tone controls
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 44.1mm at nut, 54.3mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.1mm at first fret, 23.2mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 37.3mm at nut, 55.3mm at bridge
WEIGHT 2.1kg/4.7lb
LEFT-HANDERS Yes
FINISH Antique Natural gloss nitrocellulose (as reviewed), Frontier Burst
CONTACT epiphone.com

Our player-grade '55 Southern Jumbo provides us with a reference and, while it might not appear to be a fair fight, when it was purchased in early 2020 the vintage Gibson actually cost slightly less than the USA Frontier's current street price. Indeed, if you are in the market for a Gibson-style acoustic, fierce competition also comes in the form of new boutique instruments such as the Atkin Forty Three, which streets for around £3,099.

However, what none of these slope-shouldered mahogany/spruce instruments offer is the additional layer of glistening

Pinned down: the Indian rosewood bridge boasts a bone saddle and Tusq pins

Take control: the Baggs VTC system's controls are tucked away in the soundhole

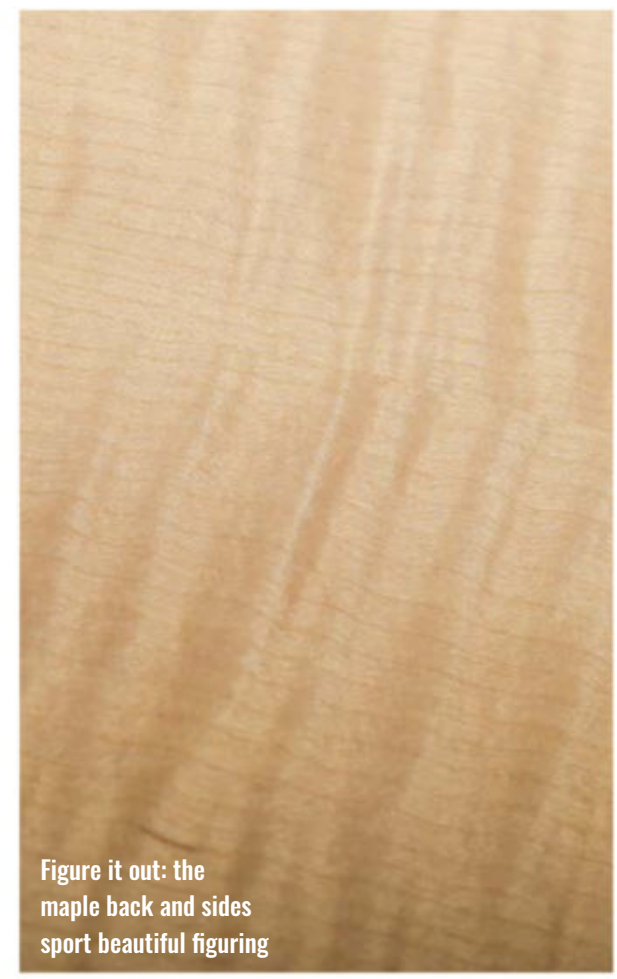


Figure it out: the maple back and sides sport beautiful figuring

upper harmonics provided by the Frontier's maple construction and longer scale length. Sure, after strumming our Southern Jumbo to death for a while and then switching to the Frontier, we miss the SJ's dry vintage character, woody depth and forward midrange emphasis. And the approachability of the shorter scale is a lot like slipping into a comfortable pair of old shoes compared to the slightly tight feel of a new 25.5-inch scale instrument that has yet to open up. But the Epiphone's hi-fi clarity and widescreen sheen are equally valid and, once the metallic zing of those brand-new 0.012-0.053 strings settles down, the Frontier's own sweetness soon begins to emerge.

This sweetness is especially apparent when you put your pick to one side and begin to explore this guitar's dynamic range with your fingertips. Though it's a powerful strummer more than capable of propelling a band arrangement, the Frontier excels with spacious fingerpicked chords and arpeggios – the guitar's clear attack combines with its long, even sustain in a way that seems optimised for trouble-free studio work. If you need to go direct or are plugging into an amp, the Baggs pickup system provides enough roll-off to prevent the high-end sounding overly synthetic, while throwing on some additional compression, EQ and room ambience all helps in an attempt to replicate the Frontier's fine acoustic qualities.

8/10 **A commanding presence both visually and sonically, the Frontier takes stage and studio duties in its stride**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Atkin The Forty Three **£3,099**
Gibson Dove Original **£3,799**
Taylor 618e **£4,319**

Pretty in pink: the 'hockey stick' headstock is a nod to the 5150's heritage

On a roll: the fingerboard edges are rolled for comfort

EVH 5150 SERIES STANDARD

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS DARRAN CHARLES

Here's your ticket back to the 1980s in a Neon Pink time machine…

Eddie Van Halen sadly passed away in October 2020. In addition to his seismic impact on the guitar and guitar playing, long universally acknowledged, the line of signature gear he left behind will ensure that his name and legacy will never be forgotten.

Each model in the EVH range represents one of the guitar designs that Eddie played during his career. The Standard on test here is an homage to the Kramer he used in the mid-to-late 1980s, albeit with a few modern appointments and design tweaks, including a compound 12-16 inch fingerboard radius and a deeper upper body curve.

Surprisingly for a guitar in this modest price range, the maple neck is quartersawn and thus less susceptible to shrinkage, with further stability provided by graphite reinforcement. The neck's C carve is slim with slightly flat shoulders, which ensure

Drop shot: the D-Tuna offers quick access to drop-D tuning

Looks to kill: the onboard killswitch is conveniently positioned

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £749
DESCRIPTION 6-string double-cutaway electric guitar, made in Mexico
BUILD Basswood body, bolt-on quartersawn maple neck (graphite reinforced) with 12-16" compound radius fretboard, 22 jumbo frets
HARDWARE EVH-branded Gotoh tuners, EVH-branded Floyd Rose locking vibrato with EVH D-Tuna
ELECTRONICS 2x EVH Wolfgang Alnico II pickups, 3-way toggle, killswitch, volume, tone
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 43.44mm at nut, 52.91mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20.76mm at 1st fret, 21.6mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 52.72mm at bridge, 36.52mm at nut
WEIGHT 3.2kg/7.05lb
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISHES Neon Pink (as reviewed), Black Burst, Aqua Burst (both with poplar burl tops), Ice Blue Metallic, Stealth Black (both with ebony fingerboards)
CONTACT evhgear.com

support for either side of our fretting hand. The hand-rubbed satin urethane finish and softened fretboard edges, meanwhile, add to the welcoming feel.

A Floyd Rose is always a mandatory appointment on Eddie's guitars, likewise the EVH-patented D-Tuna, which facilitates quick drop-D tuning and is achievable due to the vibrato being set with no uplift.

IN USE

Installing our preferred brand and gauge of strings serves as a painful reminder of just how long it can take to tune and correctly set up a Floyd Rose vibrato, even when it isn't floating. However, once we start dive-bombing like it's 1986 and marvelling at each perfect return to pitch, we remember that, for tuning stability alone, the double-locking Floyd Rose system remains king of the whammies.

The nifty killswitch button on the lower bout lets us unleash our inner Tom Morello and its location means it proves far more practical in use than many others we've encountered. Pickup selection, meanwhile, is achieved via a straightforward three-way toggle switch situated on the upper bout.

Like many other greats, Eddie augmented his tonal palette with judicious use of the volume control and, to that end, the 5150 features a fast, low-friction Bourns volume pot. The tone control, meanwhile, is a high-friction unit designed to remain in place even if nudged accidentally.

Double trouble: the Wolfgang 'buckers offer punchy tones

Signature touch: what would an EVH guitar be without a Floyd Rose?

Plugged in, the EVH Wolfgang Alnico II bridge pickup delivers everything you might expect. Through our souped-up Plexi, it sounds punchy and mid-rich and doesn't oversaturate the front-end of the amplifier. Though it's perhaps lacking a little in sonic articulation, it still cleans up well, and once effects are added we're comfortably in *Eruption* territory. The neck unit retains plenty of midrange, offering a usable rhythm sound in addition to creamy lead.

While the EVH Striped series is reserved for über-fans and tribute acts, the Standard line is aimed at those that simply want a balls-to-the-wall rock guitar – and in that regard we are not disappointed. The 5150 Series Standard is a super-slick and very well built shredder's guitar. Most importantly, however, it's fun to play – the consummate 1980s rock machine. Make you sure you have the chops to pull it off, though, because this Neon Pink finish is going to get you noticed! G

9/10 **1980s rock pedigree at an affordable price, and a whole lot of fun into the bargain**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Kramer The 84 **£749**
Charvel Pro-Mod So-Cal Style 1 **£959**
Schecter Sun Valley SS-FR **£655**

STONE DEAF
QBOOST

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

The British maker's clever dual boost pedal goes into full production with a new look and the promise of tweakable tones galore

These days, many of our favourite American pedal brands are not so much 'boutique' as 'three-storey out-of-town shopping mall', so let's hear it for plucky little homegrown brands such as Stone Deaf, which continue to help the UK punch above its weight in the field of noise-mongering tech.

The QBoost came out as a limited-edition model last Christmas. This is the full release version, which does the same deceptively flexible job – a full-range booster/preamp with switchable vintage saturation and a separate frequency-tunable boost circuit – only under a different paint job.

It actually looks sensible compared to Stone Deaf's usual cartoon quirkiness. Well, as sensible as you can be with an enclosure that seems to have been in an accident with a tin of baked beans. We love it anyway, and there's nothing going on here that compromises the clarity of the control layout.

It's a simple enough deal: there's a master bypass footswitch at the bottom left and a separate one to add the frequency boost on the right. One knob controls the output level of the main boost, while the other adjusts the centre frequency of the optional hump (whose gain and bandwidth are fixed). Finally, a switch in the middle lets you select 'modern' or 'vintage', which, as we'll soon see, basically means clean or absolutely filthy.

The enclosure is a rugged metal brick and, given that the QBoost is a British-built pedal and boasts this much functionality, the £139 asking price looks like one hell of a deal. Let's hope the tones live up to it.

IN USE

The early signs are promising indeed. Beginning with the basic boost in modern

Switched on: the slider switch flips between vintage and modern preamp modes

Northern soul: Stone Deaf pedals are hand-built just outside Manchester

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £139
DESCRIPTION Dual-boost pedal, made in UK
CONTROLS Preamp and frequency boost levels, vintage/modern preamp switch, footswitches for master and frequency boost bypass
FEATURES True bypass, powered by 9-volt mains supply only (65mA)
DIMENSIONS 112 x 72 x 52mm
CONTACT stonedeaffx.com

mode, we find unity gain – just a smidge thicker and darker than the bypassed sound – with the preamp knob set at around 10 o'clock. Start nudging it up past noon and you'll find that the gain comes on steadily. How quickly things get properly overdriven will likely depend on the amplifier you're boosting, but you can probably expect to be in full-on chunky chugging mode by the time it's maxed out.

Best turn it back down again before flipping to vintage mode, because this adds a huge helping of extra drive from inside the pedal itself. The tone remains natural but there's too much distortion here for it to be called 'transparent': push the preamp close to maximum now and it's almost a Big Muff.

Then we stomp on the second footswitch and, with the frequency dial set anywhere around halfway, we're greeted by a rich and spicy honk. It's a tightening of tonal focus that's not quite a stuck-wah effect but has certainly been judged for optimum musicality. There's little extra gain added here but the contrast with the QBoost's 'clean' sound is stark. That remains the case all the way around the frequency sweep, from whumpy bass expansion to Vox-style extra-crispy treble, making the QBoost a genuine tonal toolbox that could prove hugely useful to all sorts of players.

9/10 **About as versatile as a compact tone-shaping and gain-boosting pedal could possibly be**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Orange Two Stroke **£109**
Ground Control Audio Noodles **£249**
Walrus Audio EB-10 **£209**

GROUND CONTROL AUDIO
NOODLES

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

They say you shouldn't shop when you're hungry but luckily that doesn't apply to pedals, because this Montreal-made triple booster has much more to tempt us than just those appetising graphics

If there's anything more appealing than tonal flexibility, it's probably noodles. So fair play to Montreal-based Ground Control Audio for adorning its latest boost pedal with a fine selection of Japanese snacks.

This is the Noodles three-band active EQ/booster and, frankly, we're even more piqued by its sonic potential than we are by those oh-so-cool graphics. The unit boasts three separate boost circuits in a single box, each operating on one of three frequency bands selected by a push-button below its output level control.

Based on the preamp circuitry of the Amaterasu and Tsukuyomi devices that we reviewed in 2019, this pedal provides a choice between bass, middle and treble boost – or any combination of two, or even all three at once. When you factor in those selectable centre frequencies, according to Ground Control, that adds up to 64 possible tonal combinations. Feel free to do the maths if you want to check that – we tried and it made our brains hurt.

The nine Hz bands are detailed on Ground Control's website but given this Canadian stompbox specialist's record, you can be confident that the frequencies and bandwidths have been chosen for maximum musical goodness. Obviously this is an analogue pedal but apparently it uses digitally controlled routing to ensure that all three boosts are blended equally with the unaffected dry signal.

IN USE

Don't worry, we're not going to describe each of the 64 settings in minute detail.

On the menu: the artwork on this pedal will likely leave you feeling hungry

High life: the treble band offers 1.8kHz, 3.2kHz and 6kHz boost options

Low down: the bass control's preset frequency bands are 40Hz, 100Hz and 250Hz

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £249
DESCRIPTION Three-band boost pedal, made in Canada
CONTROLS Bass, middle and treble level knobs, each with three-way frequency selector push-button and bypass footswitch
FEATURES Buffered bypass, powered by 9-volt mains supply only
DIMENSIONS 120 x 99 x 54mm
CONTACT homeoftone.co.uk, groundcontrolaudio.com

The most important thing to know is that, in terms of those nine boosts and the available combinations thereof, the Noodles harbours no unpleasant surprises. All the frequency bands have been carefully calibrated in order to provide powerful and sometimes transformative shifts in tonal colour – from an earthy thump at the very bottom (40Hz) to a hyper-refreshing zing at the top (6kHz), via three flavours of incisive midrange bite.

Mixing two or all three of these boosts always seems to work well and, if nothing else, what the Noodles offers is an effortless way to soften the contrast between different guitars – say, by adding chime to a beefy Les Paul, filling out the low end of a spiky Tele, or indeed both – which could come in handy for gigging players.

This might well appear to be the ultimate multi-band boosting system, then? Hold up: there are a few minor functionality issues to bear in mind before you get carried away and order a dozen Noodles to go.

Firstly, the purple LEDs that display which of the frequencies are selected also act as status indicators, so you've no way of knowing where a boost is set until you switch it on. Secondly, look at the spacing of those three footswitches: tapping either of the outsiders is easy enough, and you might even be able to nail all three if you play in clogs, but engaging the mids boost alone requires the precision footwork of a prima ballerina.

Those issues are both understandable compromises rather than design howlers – and if neither feels like a deal-breaker, then the Noodles might just be the all-round booster you've been waiting for.

8/10 **A mouthwatering menu of useful boost options in one only slightly fiddly box**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Hamstead Zenith **£289**
Walrus Audio EB-10 **£209**
Stone Deaf QBoost **£139**

Ruby Guitars founder Reuben Kemp enjoying a one-man tea break

INDUSTRY INSIDER

RUBY GUITARS

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

Made by hand using locally sourced tonewoods and drawing inspiration from the pawnshop instruments of yore, Reuben Kemp's guitars have seen him forge a unique brand with an admirable ethos

When did you become interested in playing guitar?

"My parents always used to play a lot of guitar music to me and my siblings when we were very young. We'd listen to punk and new wave records when we ate breakfast. My dad also had a weird 60s unbranded acoustic lying around. I still have it. It has a weird green pickguard that looks like mouldy bread. I first picked it up when I was six and tried to make noises, which sounded nice. I probably failed but it was enough to convince my parents to buy me my own 3/4-sized electric guitar for my seventh birthday and I didn't really look back from there."

When did you develop an interest in luthiery?

"One of the very first things I did when I got that electric guitar for my seventh birthday was play around with all the action and intonation screws! Obviously I had no idea what I was doing but I wanted to know what every little bit of hardware was for. I guess the first guitar that I ever actually worked on with any success was my dad's 1970s Kay Strat copy, which was when I was about 11 or 12. It was in bits when I found it in the attic, and I set about reviving it. That was what prompted me to start learning about setups and circuitry, etc."

Why did you choose to emulate the designs of mid-century catalogue guitars?

"I was in garage-punk bands throughout my teens, and all my favourite guitarists at the time played Harmonys and Teiscos, Danelectros, etc. It was relatively easy and cheap to get hold of old Japanese guitars on eBay in the UK, so I went through a few and just connected with them. They were a struggle to play but they looked and sounded different to anything I'd used before and massaged my desperation to carve an edgy niche for myself in a music scene full of Telecasters. I'm not sure if that worked but the fondness of oddball guitars stuck with me. When I started making my own instruments, it seemed logical to combine the aesthetics and sounds of those guitars with more conventional playability."

When did you realise you had a viable business?

"When I started, my plan was just to make guitars to sell as stock, and I'd decide on the colours and pickups, etc. However, it quickly

This custom Model 03 features hot humbuckers with coil splits

This aged 24" scale Model 01 was made for Charlie Pedals

became evident that most people wanted to include their own ideas regarding looks and sound – and were happy to pay for that. After six months, all my work consisted of custom commissions, and it continues to be that way. I find collaborating with customers and realising their ideas within my own work very satisfying, and it breeds creativity; I've created new body and headstock shapes with customers that have become standard options. I have a relatively long waiting list of builds now, all of which are different to each other, while remaining fundamentally Ruby in concept. I think it's probably this flexible and collaborative approach that gets prospective customers to commit."

You also focus on locally sourced woods and open-pore finishes...

"Every craftsperson who uses wood has a responsibility to source materials as sustainably as possible, mainly as an environmental concern. Poplar, ash, beech, maple and alder, all of which I use often, are readily available across Europe. A lot of people think fretboards need to be exotic hardwoods but I usually try to push alternatives. Beech, for instance, stains brilliantly and can make beautiful fretboards without the carbon footprint. If I do have to use something like ebony or Indian rosewood for a build, I'll always make sure it's from a sustainable source. I prefer open-pore finishes mainly as an homage to the wood. Perhaps it sounds silly but if you've spent hours shaping and refining a piece of timber, it seems weird to then grain-fill it and cover it with a flat and super-shiny topcoat. It's a bit clinical; I prefer a guitar to feel tactile and organic."

Did you have any external investment starting out?

"A little bit, yes. I was granted a small government start-up loan and was lucky enough to have had some help from my family when I started out. It gave me enough to buy the tools and materials needed for my first batch of guitars."

When did you feel like you'd nailed your branding?

"I still don't think I've nailed my branding. I'm always considering tweaks to my logo and imagery; I don't think I'm ever quite happy. It became apparent early on through conversations with people that my brand concept was clear enough, even to people who weren't necessarily into guitars. I'm just paranoid about becoming complacent!"

What's your proudest moment as a maker?

"I recently made a guitar in collaboration with artist Tim Fowler. I made the guitar and he painted the body to make a true one-off, which we then auctioned. I started the project in the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd. As a white person, I've never experienced racism of any kind, and using my platform, no matter how small, was one of the things I could do to show my support for people of colour. We raised £2,700 with that guitar and every penny was donated to causes fighting racial injustice."

Where does Ruby Guitars go from here?

"There's a long way to go and it's exciting that I don't know where. Bigger premises and fancier machines would be nice. I'd love to be able to streamline production to make things a little quicker, and perhaps take on some team members one day – it would make tea breaks more interesting. As it's grown, Ruby Guitars has evolved in ways that I didn't really predict. If I can say that I worked hard at the end of the day, I'm just happy to see where it takes me."

For more visit rubyguitars.co.uk

SHOP TALK

GREG GERMINO
GERMINO AMPLIFICATION

WORDS DAVE HUNTER

It might seem strange that one of the world's best-respected names in reproduction Marshall-style amps is based in the United States. But consider the part that the British stack played in establishing the Southern rock sound of the region and Greg Germino's history with these legendary amps begins to make a lot more sense…

The chances are that if you've ever gone in search of vintage Plexi or JTM45-style tones and wanted the best on the market but didn't actually want to buy vintage, that road led you to Greg Germino's door. Everyone knows that different players' quests for the Marshall tone might well express desires for very different sounds. But when you want a new amp that sounds like the real thing circa 1968 or so, a high proportion of players who know their Plexis will tell you to track down a Germino.

Germino's attention to detail – often details that few others even know about – has landed his amps in the backlines of Charlie Starr, Earl Slick, Brad Whitford, Audley Freed, Jimmy Herring and a host of others. Put simply, Greg's amps are built like the real deal, look like the real deal and, most importantly, sound like the real deal. Why? Because he's seen inside more real-deal Marshalls from the golden era than just about anyone on the planet other than those who made them in the first place.

Germino was born in Durham, North Carolina, in 1958 and grew up just across the street from the East Campus of renowned Duke University, through which countless classic rock bands would pass on their college-circuit tours of the following two decades.

So, if it was The Beatles on *The Ed Sullivan Show* that triggered the young enthusiast to start jumping round the living room and thrashing air guitar in the early 1960s, it was the full-on live experience during the heyday of Southern rock that truly hooked him in his teens.

"The quantum shift was when I went to see the Allman Brothers, February 1972, after Duane Allman passed," says Germino. "I went to see that show at Cameron Indoor Stadium at Duke University – we could take the free bus from the East Campus to the West Campus and get dropped off right at the venue.

I had just turned 14 and I took my little Sony cassette player that I'd been listening to this other stuff on and recorded the show. I was just floored. I was totally knocked out by them. And that was the rare five-man-band version of the Allmans, way before Chuck Leavell came in."

Germino says he basically learnt how to play guitar from that recorded show. "I wore the tape out. I'd splice it back together and stuff like that. So really, between the age of 14 and 15, I graduated from acoustic guitar into electric guitar and, by the time I was 16, I was playing in a band with people."

BURST BUBBLE

Like so many big Southern rock acts of the day, the Allmans were major promoters of the Marshall tone. But they also helped fire up another desire that burned bright in every teenage wannabe guitar star of the era: if you wanted to do it right, you had to do it on a Burst. Germino was no different – but even back then both the amp and guitar of choice were pretty hard to come by.

"My first amp was an Ampeg B-12 XT Portaflex flip-top, a '67 with a couple 12-inch Jensens," says Germino. "That was a nice amp."

By this point, Germino had been through several guitars and was playing a Goldtop with P-90s. "Where we were, $350 to $450 was the going rate for a [non-vintage] Les Paul," he says. "I had a '68 or '69 Custom that wasn't a great guitar. Then I answered an ad in the paper. The guy said, 'Gibson Les Paul, $350'. I go over there and it's in a brown case. I open it and it's a '59 Les Paul but it had been brush-painted. You couldn't see the grain in the top wood. It was non-existent."

Being a smart shopper, Germino paid $350 for the '59 – the money kindly loaned to him by his grandparents – and sold his Custom to his band-mate. "I played that guitar for about a year-and-a-half," he says, "and when I sanded the cruddy brush-paint finish off, everybody came out of the woodwork and wanted to buy it." Eventually, someone did, with Germino "foolishly" trading that '59 for the P-90 Goldtop.

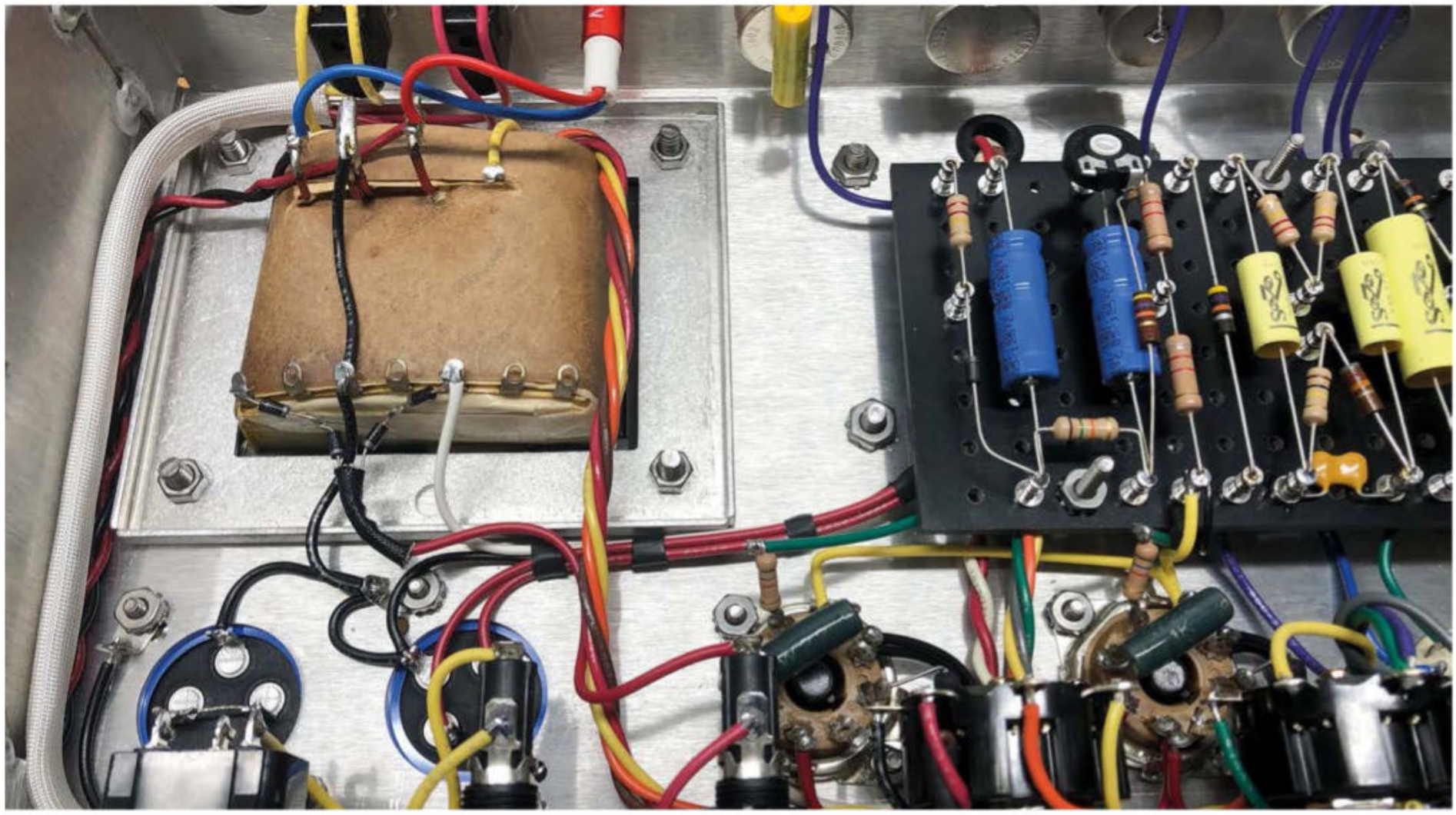
"I was 15 years old," he says. "Hindsight being 20-20, yeah, that guitar would be very valuable these days. But the thing was, it was that time period: 1973-74. Guitars were $350. I bought an SG with a sideways tremolo, for the same amount of money, from a college student. Later, I bought a '58 Strat for $450, found out that I hated Stratocasters. But that was just the going rate. A Les Paul Junior was a hundred bucks."

At the time, Greg was writing George Gruhn at Gruhn Guitars, looking for a sunburst Les Paul. "This would have been '74, '75, '76, somewhere in there," he says. "And I still have three letters from them – and a sunburst Les Paul from Gruhn's back then was between $2,500 to $2,800. The most expensive thing they had was an Explorer and it was $4,000. So that just puts things into perspective."

All the while, our hero was getting serious about electronics, acing his high-school classes in a number of engineering-based subjects and heading towards a career as a technician specialising in DC circuits. It's clear how this might pull him inside the chassis of Marshall amps – once he got his hands on them.

MARSHALL MYSTIQUE

Rare as they were, vintage Les Pauls were at least USA-made. The amp of choice being a British import, however, meant relying on the foibles of distribution, and the occasionally quixotic history of Marshall's commercial inroads into North America. The New York-based Unicord company helped ensure better availability after acquiring the US distributorship in about 1968. But, says Germino, earlier amps were still hard to come by for many years.



OPPOSITE Germino's Classic 45 model offers his upgraded take on the JTM45 sound

"Primarily what was available in this area was a trickle-down of Marshall amplifiers that probably came from Manny's, because Unicord was the distributor and that was in New York," he says. "Most of the stuff that we were seeing was coming down from that way. We didn't see a lot of Marshalls earlier than '68 or '69,and the majority of those were Lead circuit amps, 50- and 100-watters. That was what we were cutting teeth on down here."

Germino acquired his own first Marshall, a 50-watter, in 1977. But being a kid in the era of loud, it didn't quite scratch the itch. Soon after, he traded up to a '74 MkII 100-watter, only to realise how loud 100 watts of raging Marshall really was. "Oh my god, it's blisteringly loud! So then I figured out we could yank two of the power tubes and run it at 50."

Germino also knew by then, as the adage so often went, that the old ones supposedly sounded better than the newer ones. Putting his '74 up on the bench alongside a friend's earlier Plexi provided his first real glimpse into the essentials of the tone and kicked off a decades-long adventure into discerning the best of the golden era of British rock amplification.

"I should say," Germino elaborates, "everything from those days is a little foggy – and when I say 'foggy', I mean smoky, because that's just what we were doing back then. But we opened up my Marshall and, at the time, he had a better understanding than I did but I was really keen to learn about that stuff. We sussed out what was there and changed some components in that '74 and did make it sound a whole lot better."

As he worked the day job in DC electronics through the 1980s, Germino kept playing and buying vintage Marshalls. As different and more unusual pre-Unicord circuits cycled through, he got his hands on gems such as a JTM45/100, a '68 Super Tremolo and a variety of Bass circuit heads. Soon he had compiled the expertise to make him the go-to guy for Marshall work in this part of the southern mid-Atlantic states.

LEAD ME ON

Although different classic tones come to mind depending on which player you're referencing and from when, most people's touchstone for *that sound* comes from the Plexi-era Lead circuit – and Germino is well primed to tell us how that differs from the tweed-Bassman-derived circuit that kicked off the line in '62 with the JTM45.

"There's seven different components there that were changed," he says. "The output stage coupling caps and the tonestack components changed in value, the output stage couplers went from .1 to .022, so that's letting less low end through. The tonestack components changed in that Lead value, which was adopted in many other amps later on. So that pushes where your tone controls' EQ are working."

The biggest alteration after that, says Germino, was the preamp, which went from a shared to a split-cathode design. "That's where channel one gets its own resistor and bypass cap, which is a different value from channel two," he explains. "Back in the Plexi days, the split cathode on the channel one side was 820 ohms. You don't see the 2.7k cathode resistor for channel one coming in until several months into the metal-panel era, which would be after mid '69 – June, July, August, somewhere in there. I try to get specific about this stuff because I'm basing what I tell you on things that I've actually seen in person, not on a picture.

"And then additionally, you know, they are really trying to voice these things for lead guitar, the coupling cap for channel one is also a different value. And I'd be remiss if I didn't say, 'Hey, don't forget the bright cap'. Because the bright cap on channel one, that was probably the thing that changed the voice of it more than anything. A bright switch on a Fender is 120 pico-farad, basically. A bright cap on a Lead Marshall: 5,000 pico-farad, which is .005 micro-farad. What that does is strip out a lot of low-end in that preamp section and make the amp crunch really early.

“I SHOULD SAY, EVERYTHING FROM THOSE DAYS IS A LITTLE FOGGY. AND WHEN I SAY ‘FOGGY’, I MEAN SMOKY, BECAUSE THAT’S JUST WHAT WE WERE DOING BACK THEN”

And that specific bright-cap component is why you begin to see people bridging channel one into channel two on Marshall amps. But you can really just break down the Marshall amps into those two circuits.”

Germino thinks it’s the overall flexibility of the Lead circuit that ensures most people gravitate towards it more than any other – people including Eric Clapton. “You can do everything you want to do with it,” he says. “You can plug into channel two and pretty much get a Bass circuit sound just like Eric Clapton used in Cream. Clapton was plugging into the top input of channel two. If you go look at this stuff, Clapton’s playing those 45/100s plugged into channel two, and even the later stuff, *Cream Live*, he’s still plugged into channel two. He just preferred that rounder tone that you get from that Bass circuit.”

TRANSFORMERS TO TWEEDS

Aside from getting the circuit details right, there are hundreds of variables in components and construction techniques that contribute to dialling in any amp – and screwing up just one of these can get it entirely wrong. Of the parts that matter most, Germino tells us some of them might be obvious, while others are more unassuming:

“Transformers are number one. I use Heyboer and Mercury Magnetics, specifically for certain models, and they’re both great. They’re of comparable quality and sound equally as good in the models that I use them in. That’s number one.”

Another thing Germino spends a lot of time doing is looking for NOS tube sockets, as he’s not a huge fan of many of the newer tube sockets that have become common across the industry.

“I am not real crazy about a lot of the newer tube sockets that are standard, that pretty much everybody uses,” he says. “I’ll search out some old Cinch or EBY octal or preamp sockets, because that was a sore point in the 100-watt Marshalls. Those McMurdo sockets, I mean they’re just ‘okay’. People charge big money for ’em now for restorations if you can find ’em, and supplies of them have sort of dried up. But that was not a great tube socket when you’re running 500 volts at the plate. And that doesn’t make a difference in sound but it does in terms of reliability. Other things, your voltages and your filtering, the current capacity of the power transformer, all of those are equally as important.”

Those big Plexi-style circuits can mean big volume. To help alleviate the sound pressure levels, Germino typically makes one allowance to modern requirements by adding an optional master volume. For this, he likes a dual-ganged potentiometer placed in the post-phase-inverter position (PPIMV), which has become standard for many makers. Otherwise, when it’s important to keep it to sub-stack decibel levels, lately he’s gone a different direction entirely.

“My dealer at the Amp House, Chris, asked me to consider doing some tweed Deluxe builds,” says Germino. “I was like, ‘I’ve got to research it!’ I’m not going to just come out of pocket and do it, because there are a lot of good people doing that already: Victoria, Clark, the Tungsten Crema Wheat, Rondo’s Speed Shop, he does a really nice amp. I’m fortunate to have a lot of friends who had a lot of money and bought a lot of amplifiers over the years that I had access to. I brought in a couple of old tweed Deluxes and some other variants that people had loaned me. I just looked them over and they were all really nice, and were all more similar than dissimilar. But I found out quick that there’s just some magic to the original circuit. You don’t want to deviate too far from that, because that amp is what it is. It’s probably one of the greatest recording amps of all time.”

In the few years since his Tweed Deluxe launched, Germino has also offered a 5F6A Bassman, 5F4 Super, and 5E7 Bandmaster, and has often turned to these models himself in the band in which he still gigs as often as two or three times a week.

“They help to keep the volume down in the smaller clubs,” he says, “and still sound great in the process.”

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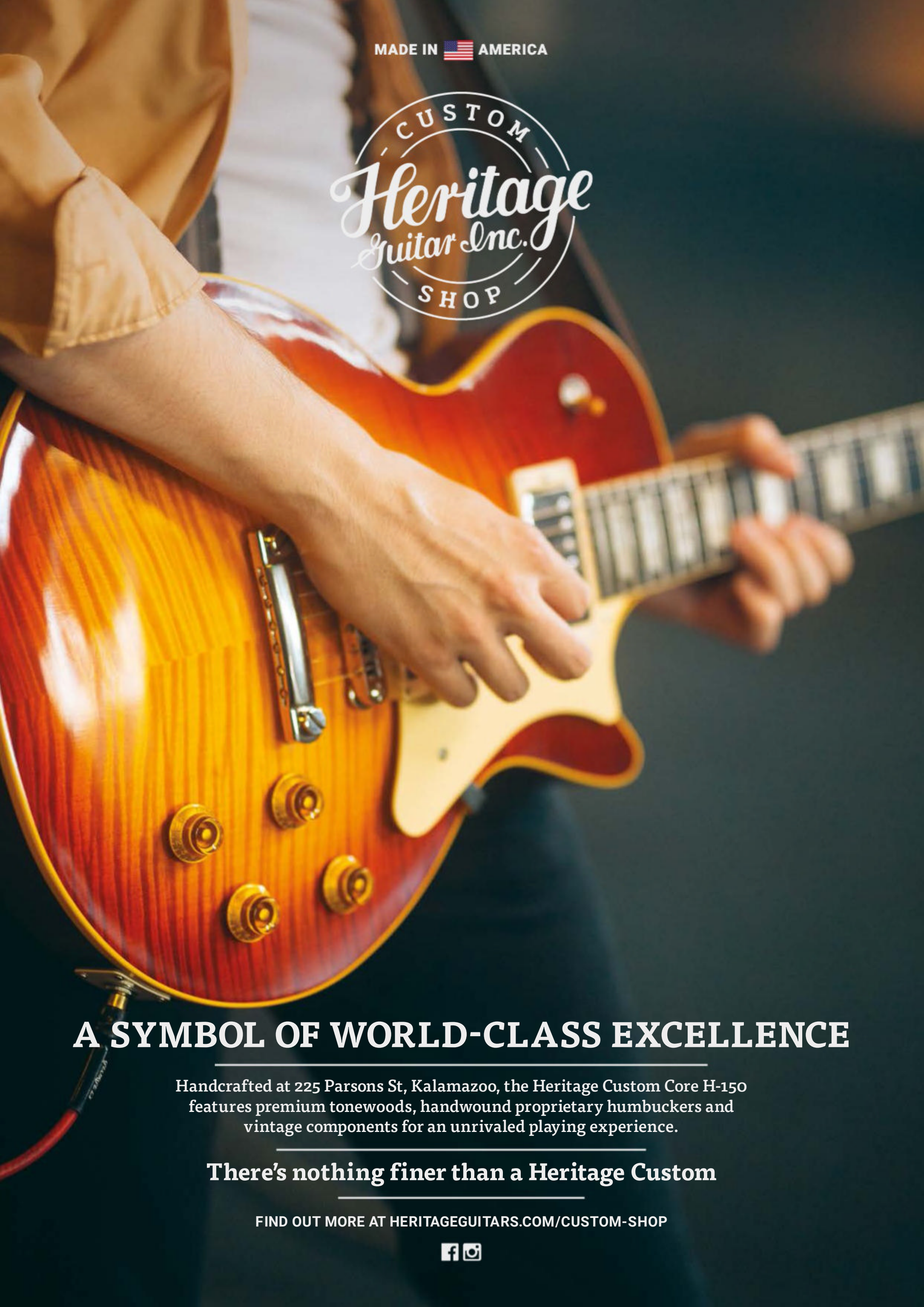

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DIY WORKSHOP

TELECASTER TO ESQUIRE CONVERSION

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY HUW PRICE

Is less ever really more? We're testing the theory by converting a T-style partscaster into an Esquire with the Eldred mod

If you're looking for a high-quality bolt-on guitar but funds are tight, the humble partscaster could be the solution. They're relatively easy to assemble and, if you're lucky, you might find a pre-built one that has plenty of genuine Fender parts. This one was discovered in a Cardiff shop and features a Fender neck with a nitrocellulose finish and a 1950s-style decal.

The ash BCG body is an aftermarket item but it's light and also has a nitro finish. The bridge and bridge pickup may well be Fender items too, and the controls include an Oak Grigsby switch and a pair of CTS pots. With Kluson-style Gotoh tuners also included, it's clear that whoever assembled this guitar didn't compromise on parts.

This guitar has already had a Gibson 57 Classic humbucker fitted in the neck position but its new owner is more Billy Gibbons than Keith Richards and wants to convert it to a 1957-style Esquire. I'll be making a few modifications and trying out a different wiring scheme that should transform the front position tone into something very distinct and useable.

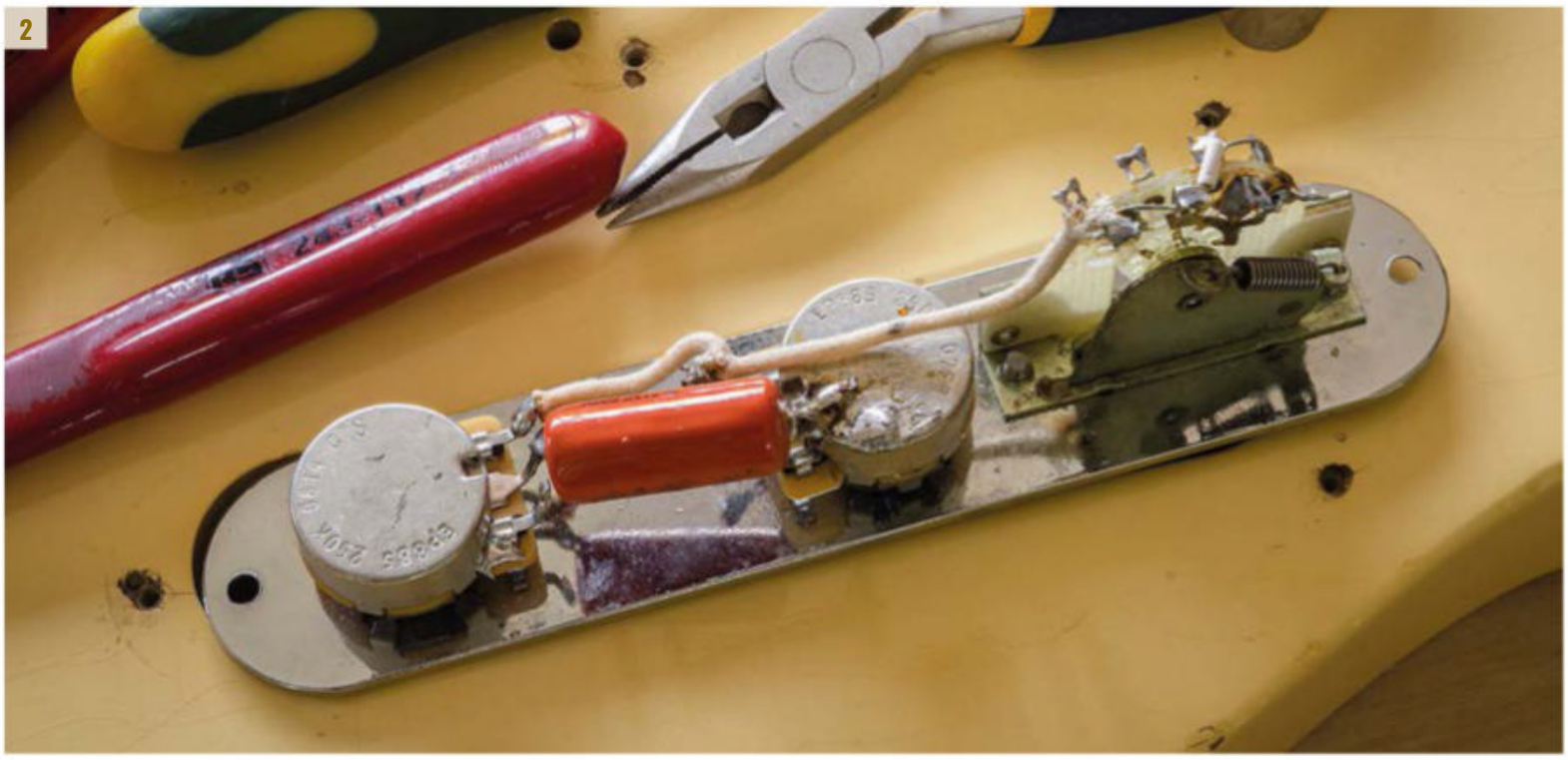
STRIP DOWN

Telecasters are quite simple to dismantle. I usually begin by removing the controls, which requires desoldering the pickup wires: two hot connections on the switch and two ground connections on the volume pot casing. You can disconnect the output wires at the socket end but, if you're working on a T-type guitar with a vintage-style socket cup, I strongly recommend leaving it intact and desoldering the wires from the volume control.

Traditional Telecaster sockets can be tricky to install and even trickier to reinstall. In fact, you can even buy specialist tools for the job. Fortunately, this guitar has a modern Electrosocket-style mount, which sees the socket screwed into the cup and two screws fixing the cup onto the body.

With the control assembly removed, I ditch the strings and detach the bridge by removing the four fixing screws behind the saddles. When you lift the bridge off any Tele, be careful to feed the pickup wires through the drilled hole linking

1 This partscaster has a genuine Fender neck on an aftermarket ash body, with an added humbucker and some quality parts



2 The control assembly includes two CTS potentiometers, an Oak Grigsby switch and an orange drop capacitor – but everything needs to be stripped out

the pickup rout to the control cavity, rather than simply tugging at the bridge. The humbucker is pickguard mounted and both lift straight off the body.

Because the owner has asked me to distress the finish and hardware, I remove the tuners but not the bushings and, with the neck still attached to the body, the guitar gets three freeze and thaw cycles in my deep freezer. After enhancing the new checking lines with some stain and adding some chips and dents, the guitar is ready for reassembly.

ELDRED MOD

Purists may disagree but, with standard Esquire wiring, the front position is so lacking in treble and clarity that many players find it utterly unusable.

Fortunately, former Fender Custom Shop head honcho Mike Eldred devised a wiring modification that remains popular among Esquire fans, as it gives the front position a useful cocked-wah type tone, while also retaining the Esquire's traditional middle and back settings. The middle position has the pickup connected to the volume and tone controls, and the back position keeps the volume connection but disconnects the tone.

I won't dwell too much on the details because you can watch me wire up the controls in the video that accompanies this article and other wiring diagrams are easy to find online – the one I'm using comes from sixstringsupplies.co.uk. I'm retaining the three-way switch and volume control pot but using a push/pull switching pot for the tone control to utilise the full potential of the bridge pickup that I'm installing.

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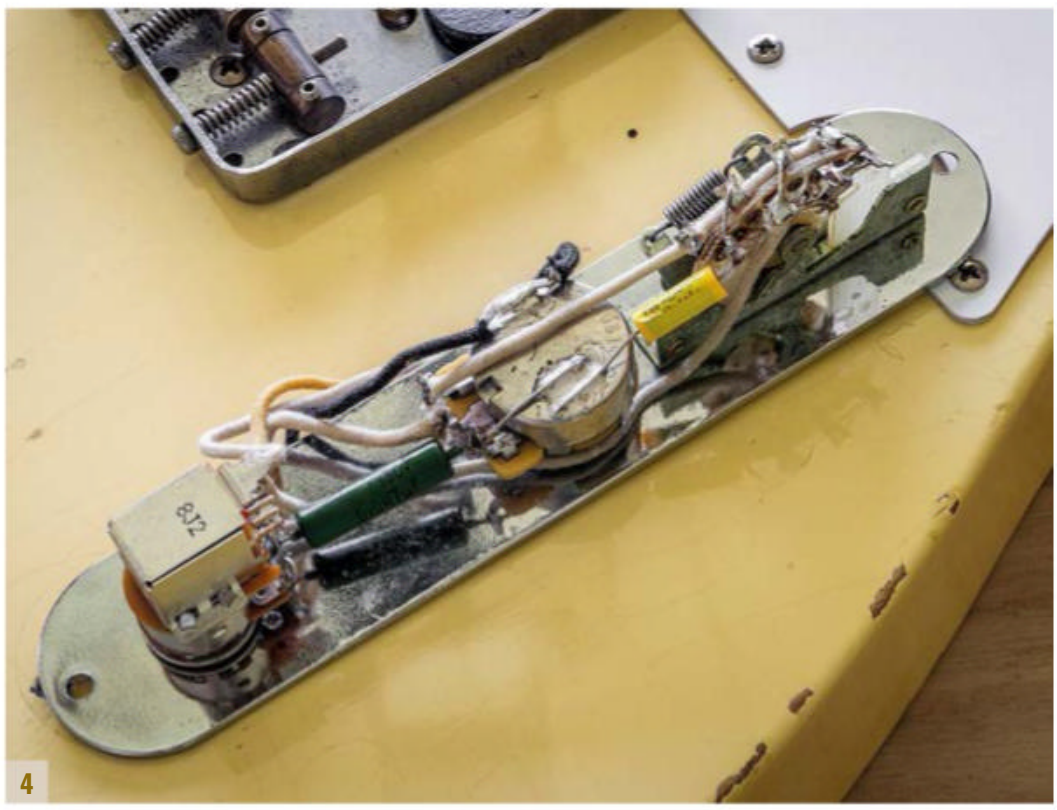

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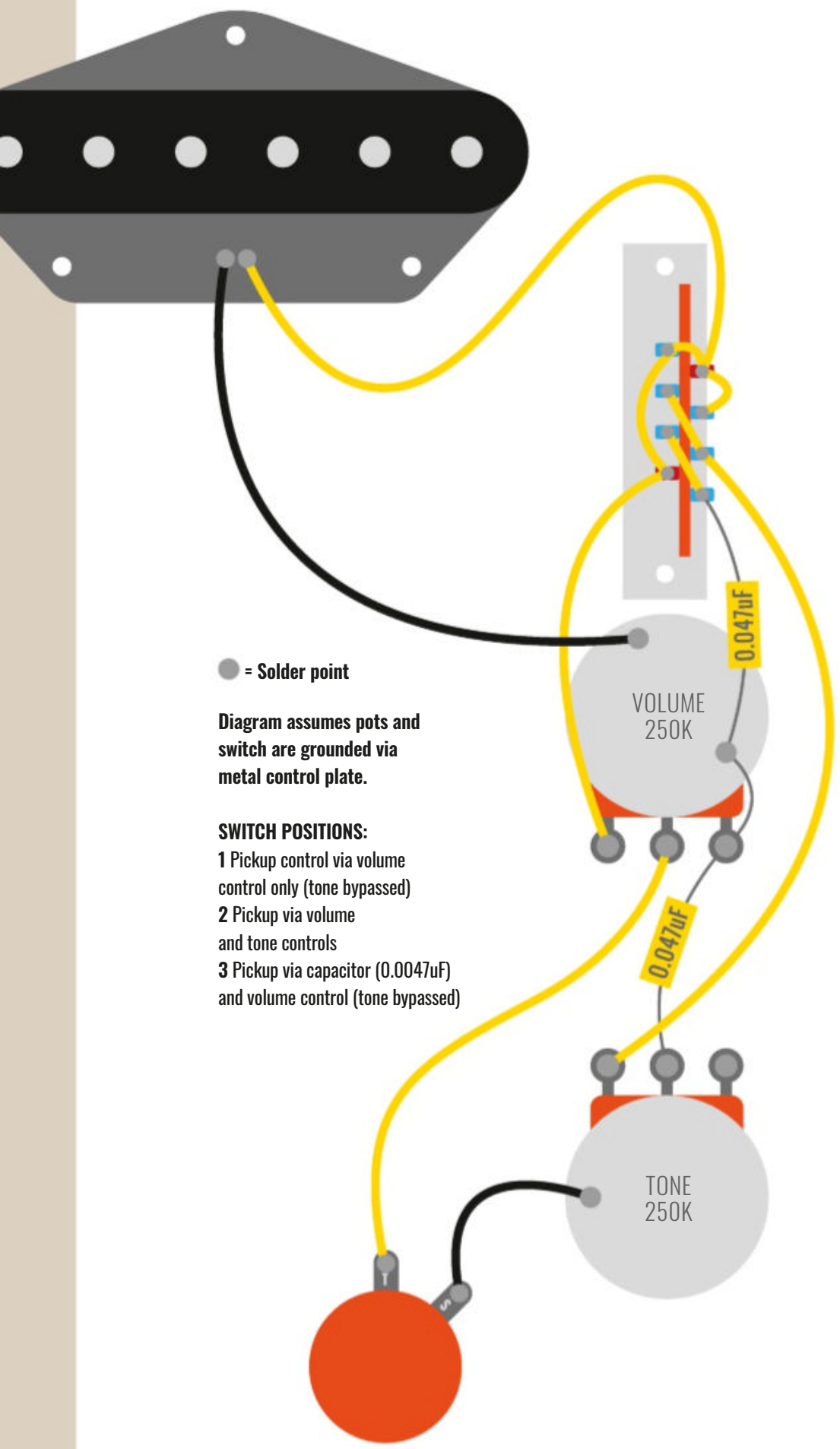


3 When stripping out wiring, take care if you want to recycle the original pots and switch, as the solder tags can break easily

4 The controls have been reconfigured following the Eldred mod schematic, with a push/pull switch for coil tapping the Oil City Wapping Wharf pickup

The Oil City Wapping Wharf that we've selected has tappable extra windings, with the main coil wound to 10k with 43-gauge wire. That might seem hot but 43-gauge wire is thinner than the usual 42-gauge, which means the resistance is naturally higher. The extra windings add another 5k for higher output and extra midrange, and this boost will be accessible via the push/pull switch.

I replace the bulky Orange Drop tone capacitor with a Russian military paper/oil type and use a Mallory 150 0.0047uF for the Eldred mod setting. Sourcing a push/pull pot with a solid shaft can be difficult, and Tele knobs can be a little wonky when they're mounted onto split shafts. The workaround is to use a small brass sleeve that slips over the split shaft, effectively turning it into a solid shaft.

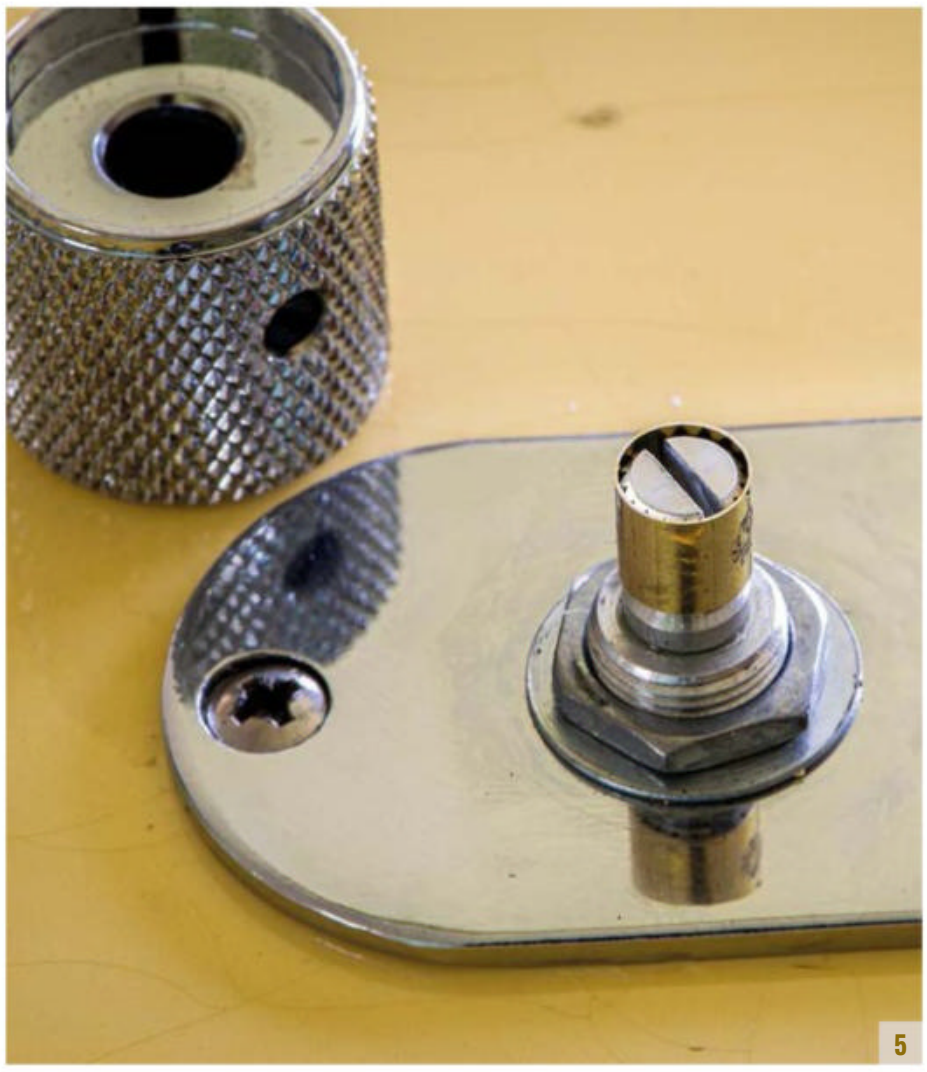
METAL MODS

In addition to fitting some flat-top knobs, the owner has requested steel saddles. I duly ordered a set of non-compensated and non-threaded saddles from axecaster.co.uk but they look a little too shiny for our relic'd partscaster. Since I'm artificially ageing the tuners in hydrochloric acid fumes anyway, I put the saddles and knobs in there too.

The tuners take an hour but the saddles need two more before they look nice and dulled. I'm hoping this method will keep the height and intonation screws rust-free and moving freely, which isn't always the case when metal parts are electronically aged in saltwater. After a quick wiring check, the guitar is ready to be restrung and given a quick setup.

SINGLE ISSUES

Esquires are reputed to be more resonant, lively and sustaining than Telecasters, thanks to the reduced magnetic string-pull of their single pickup. I have never fully bought



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5 You can convert a split-shaft pot to a solid shaft using one of these brass rings from Allparts

6 These steel saddles and screws are sold by Axecaster but, if they are too shiny for you, hydrochloric acid fumes can be used to relic them

7 & 8 Some examples of the lacquer checking produced by the deep-freeze treatment

7

into that theory but this Esquire conversion offers something that's so different to a regular Telecaster that I could seriously contemplate having one of each.

The front-position Eldred setting takes the Esquire into the realm of a Les Paul Junior, with a thicker and more adenoidal voicing that's fantastic for powerchords and soloing. And with the facility to preset treble roll-off in the middle position, the tonal range is impressive too.

Some experimentation with the value and type of capacitor used for the front position may be worthwhile here, because much will depend on your amp and your speakers. 0.0047uF is a great starting point – smaller values will brighten the tone and larger values will darken it.

Overall, this newly minted Esquire is nothing like a three-pickup guitar but it can produce three very distinct voicings. I also find that the steel saddles have helped to make the guitar livelier – and that's apparent even with the same old set of strings. This project has been a lot of fun and doesn't require specialist skills or tools, so if you don't like the neck pickup in your Tele, removing rather than replacing it might be the smart move.

Visit youtube.com/theguitarmagazine to see the accompanying video. Head to huwpriceguitar.com to find out more about Huw's work

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AMPLIFIER FAQ

Now that the Lancer has been returned to Bernie Marsden, Chris Fantana turns his attention to this lone Ranger

Have a burning question about your amp or, worse still, a burning amp? Email us at editors@guitar.com

1

1 This Ranger is a little younger than its Lancer sibling, dating to early 1961

2 The internal build quality is excellent for the period, featuring high-quality components throughout

Appearing in the 1960 Gibson catalogue alongside the Lancer, the GA-20 model was available in two versions, the Crest and the Ranger. The latter came with a T suffix (GA-20T) indicating that it had onboard tremolo, while the Crest was left without. Rated at a modest 16 watts, the Ranger was primarily aimed at pro players and came with a hefty $189.50 price-tag (that's approximately $1,750 in today's money).

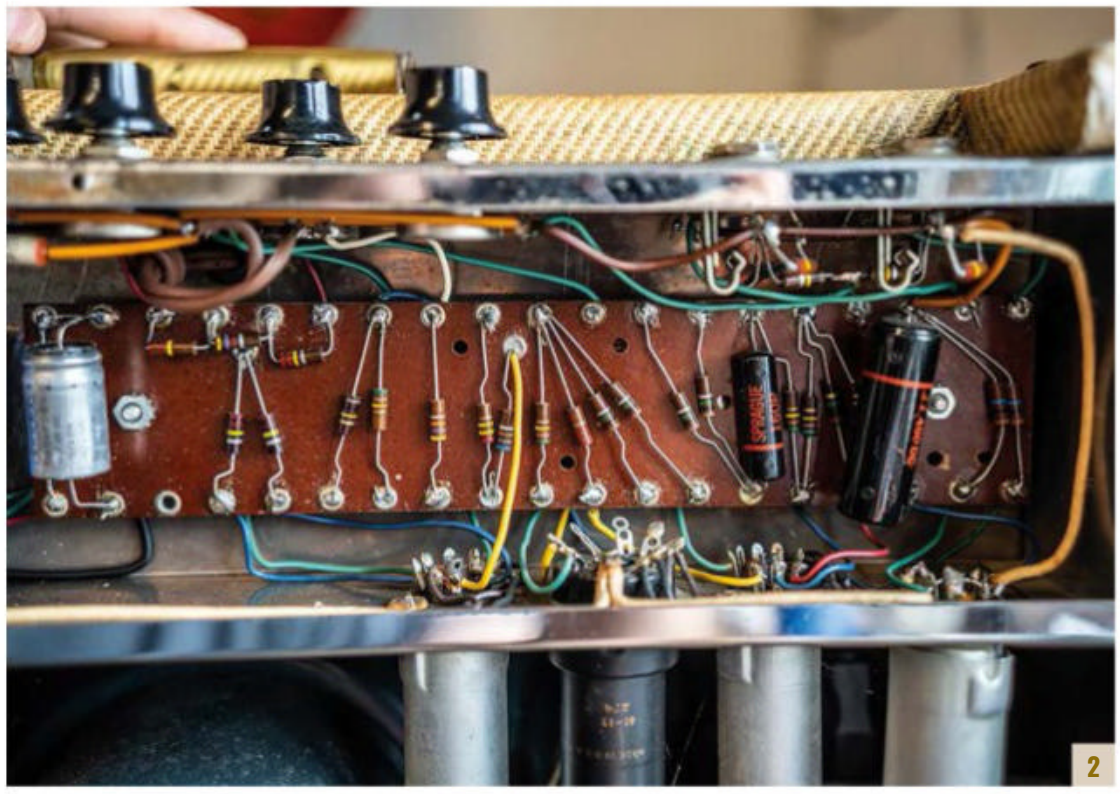
This particular amplifier, serial number #38949, dates to early 1961 and, just like Bernie's Lancer, is in fantastic condition. It's had some maintenance over the years and is in okay health but it needs a little love and care for its upcoming workload.

GO GO POWER RANGER

At some time in its life, this amplifier was imported from the USA. Most likely after that, someone installed an external step-down transformer in the rear of the cabinet, allowing the amp's user to plug it into UK wall sockets and use the Ranger without fuss. Good idea? Maybe. What's unfortunate, however, is that the transformer is both far too large and far too powerful for the GA-20T's requirements, and was shoehorned into the cabinet in the only place it would fit: right next to the preamp valves.

For those unfamiliar with best practices in chassis layout, a designer must do everything in their power to position the super-sensitive preamp section as far away from the mains supply as possible in order to avoid unwanted noise. Placing a huge transformer next to the preamp section is probably the worst thing you could do – and, when powered up, this amp emits the tell-tale 50Hz hum from the speaker to confirm that. The first job, then? Get that sorted out.

On the test bench, this amplifier draws about 65 watts in use, with a peak of about 80 watts if we push it beyond its normal operating conditions. With that in mind, a 100-watt transformer will be more than enough for this Ranger, as well as being much smaller. Using the same bracketry as the old unit, we install the new transformer on the other side of the cabinet, tucked out of sight and, crucially, as far away from the preamp as we can situate it, to better keep the noise down. With the cables routed and secured correctly, we fire up the amplifier to reveal that the horrible hum is no longer present and we can continue with our service work.



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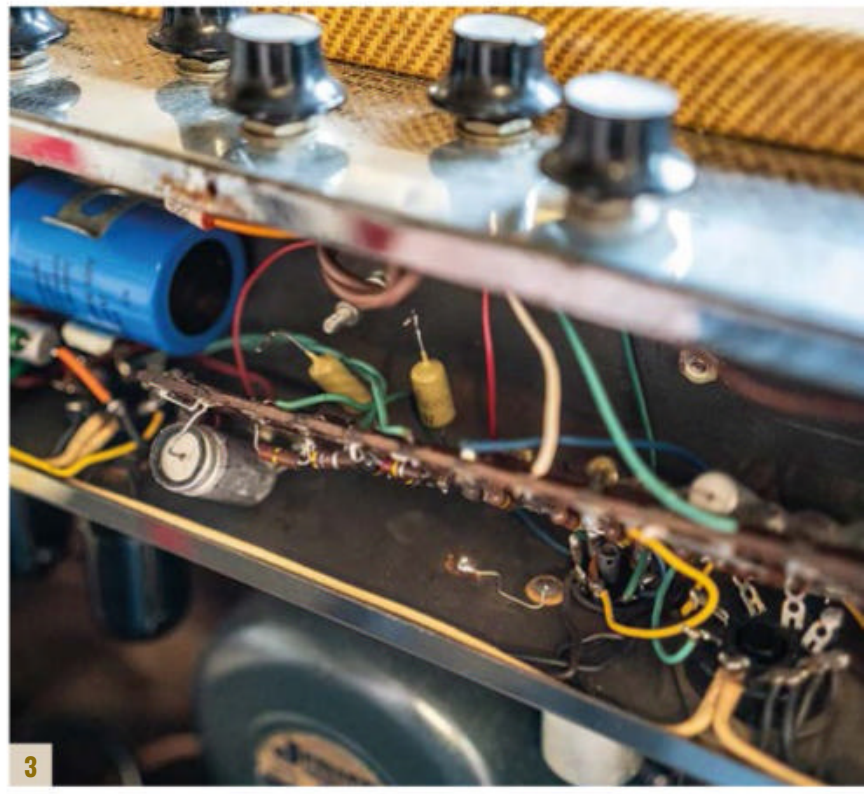

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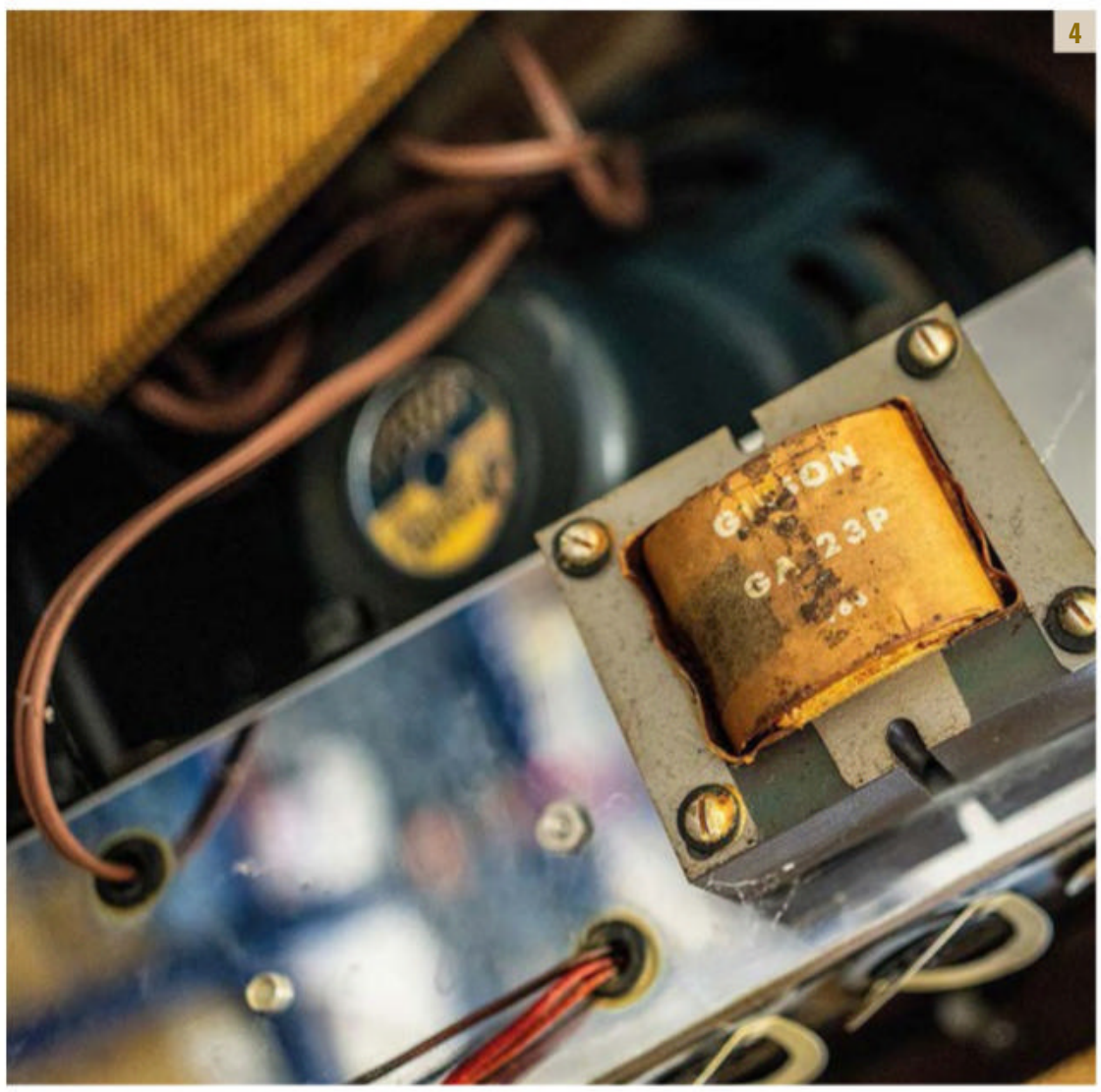

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HOME ON THE RANGER

I'm impressed with the build quality inside the chassis. Real care and attention has been paid to the wire runs and the component positioning. The main component board is the only real fly in the ointment, as there are components mounted on both sides, making replacement rather fiddly.

During the play-test, I notice that one of the input sockets intermittently produces a hum after you've unplugged from it, and that one of the 6V6 valve sockets produces a crackle when the valve is wobbled. Thankfully, this is all easily rectified with Servisol spray and some elbow (finger?) grease.

With these minor issues sorted, we check the bias and measure the output power. The two 6V6s in this amplifier share a common cathode resistor and, using simple Ohm's law to calculate the current flowing through each valve, I find they're running slightly hot.

The resistor should be 200 ohms but measures short at 172. Swapping it out for the nearest modern standard value of 220 ohms brings the operating conditions of the 6V6s back in line. A quick check on the oscilloscope reveals no crossover distortion, an indication of too cold a bias, so we're good to go. The output power is a smidge over 16 watts and our final play-test shows off just how good this amp sounds. By now the P12R speaker has been perfectly broken in – it shrugs off the abuse we give it.

The 1960 catalogue says that the Ranger has "clear, clean tones and solid undistorted response". I couldn't agree more. Such richness in tone is rarely found today. If you ever come across one of these amplifiers, buy without hesitation.

Visit riftamps.com for more on Rift's range of UK-built boutique amplifiers

3 Some of the components are found hidden on the backside of the board

4 The power transformer is branded 'Gibson'

5 Our replacement step-down transformer sits neatly inside the cabinet – away from the preamp

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FIVE MINUTES TO...

LINDSEY BUCKINGHAM

WORDS LEIGH FUGE

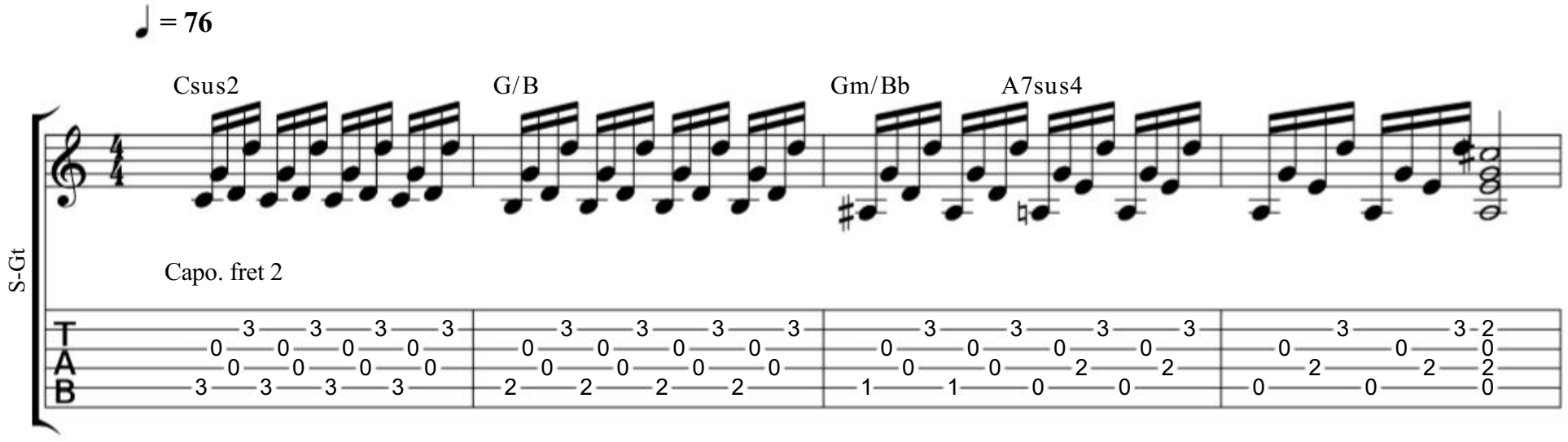
The former Fleetwood Mac guitarist's individual approach helped propel the band to multi-platinum success. Here are some quick tricks you can learn to add a Buckingham vibe to your playing…

While Peter Green and Danny Kirwan may be more commonly thought of as the guitar heroes of the Fleetwood Mac lineage, it was their successor Lindsey Buckingham and his unique sound and playing style that helped drive the band to multi-platinum success and household-name status.

Buckingham's style certainly isn't typical of your pentatonic-loving blues-rock players. Instead, he fuses elements of blues with country and folk to create a something altogether more individual. All the examples in this lesson are played in double drop D tuning (low to high – DADGBD) with a capo on the second fret. All the fret numbers are relative to the capo.

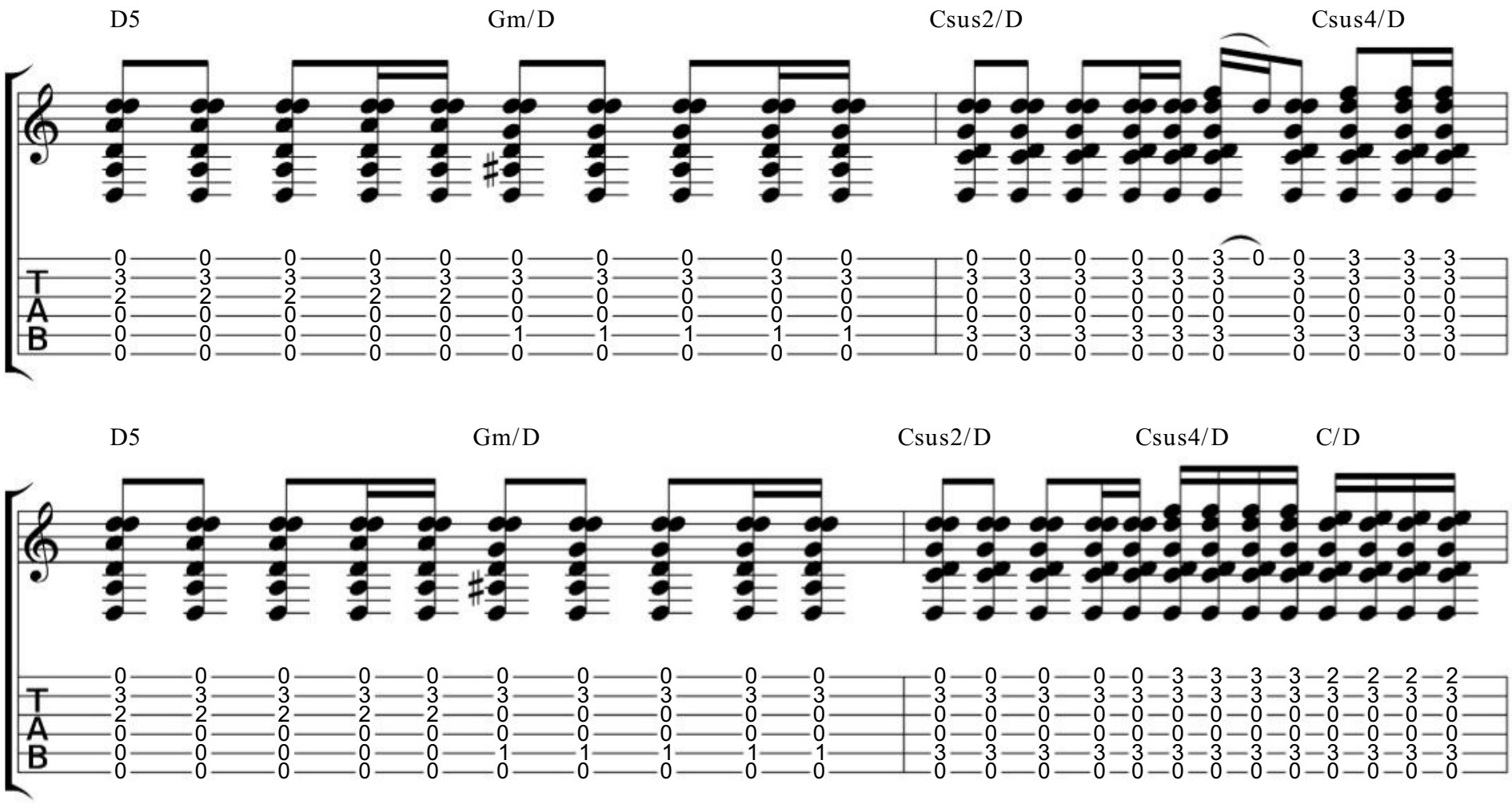
FINGER-PICKED RHYTHMS

Buckingham draws a lot of influence from country and folk music and often prefers to approach rhythms using fingerstyle rather than a pick. His simplified Travis picking technique appears throughout many Fleetwood Mac hits. Here, we have a 16th-note rolling pattern with a moving bass note.



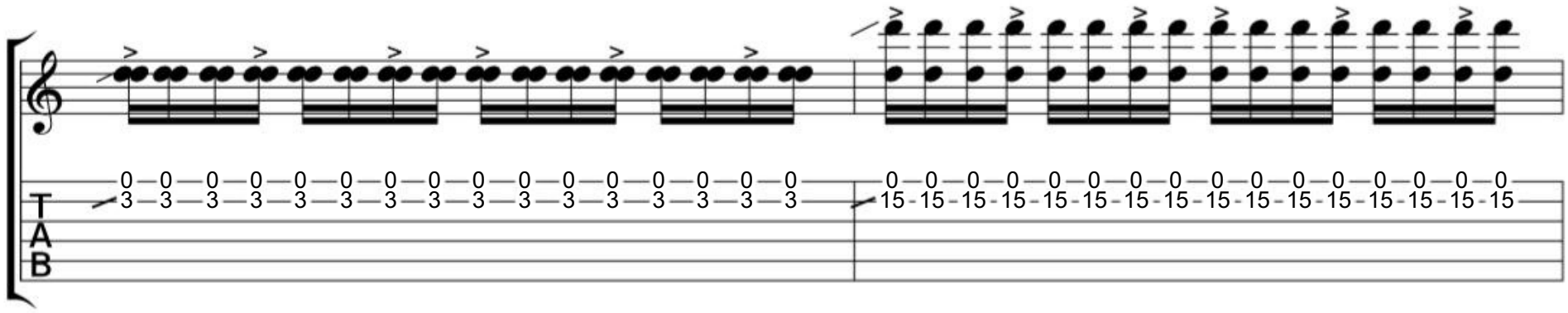
UNIQUE CHORD VOICINGS

In some of Fleetwood Mac's more raucous rock moments, Buckingham likes to lean on unconventional chord voicings rather than the more orthodox major/minor/powerchord formula. This rhythm uses slash chords and sus2 and sus4 chords to give it a vibrant and interesting sound.



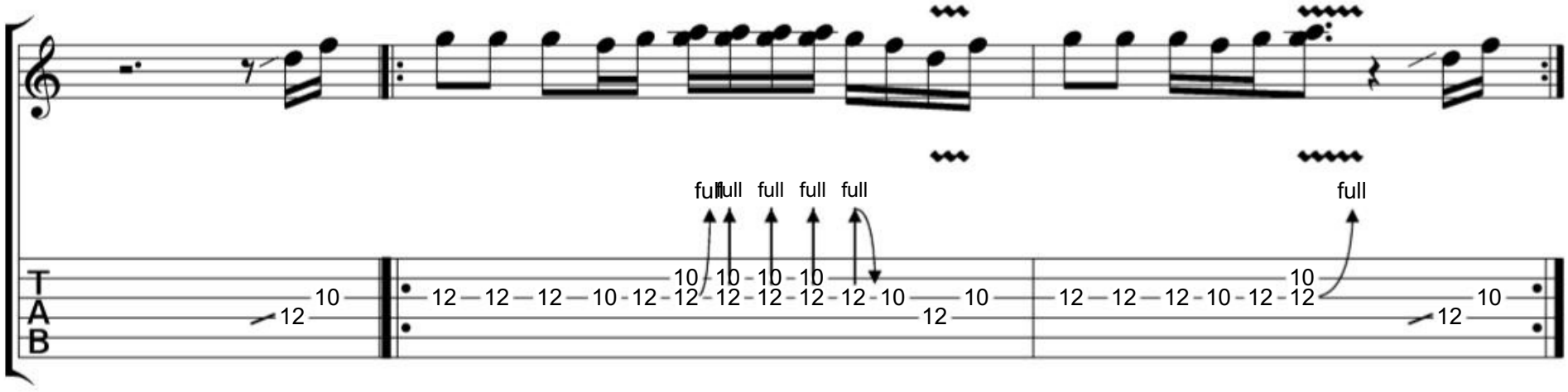
REPEATED ACCENTED LINES

On paper, this looks easy – it's the third fret of the B string with the open E string played together in straight 16th notes before sliding up to the 15th fret, right? Simple. But pay attention to the accent markings. You're accenting the 1, and "a" of 1 and the "&" of 2. You're repeating the same across beats 3 and 4. Suddenly struggling? Try splitting the bar in half and counting 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, then accent each of the ones.



MELODIC LEADS

When Lindsey does dip into more traditional-sounding lead lines, he keeps them melodic. This is a D minor pentatonic shape (as the A, D, G and B strings are still tuned conventionally). The focus is on the melody rather than pentatonic noodling and jamming.



Leigh Fuge is a guitar teacher and professional musician from Swansea in the UK. He has taught hundreds of students face to face and via the Musicteacher.com platform. He has over 10 years' experience working in the industry as a touring musician, session guitarist and teacher. Musicteacher.com has a network of teachers based all around the UK – check out the website today to find your local tutor.

CHORD CLINIC

A MINOR

WORDS ROD FOGG

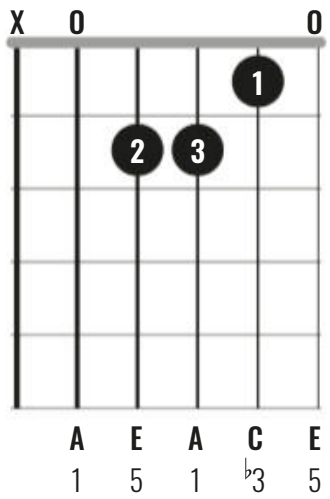
This month, we're tackling the A minor chord and uncovering some variations that can help liven up your progressions

The basic A minor is one of the easiest chords to play, with its close finger spacing and lack of long stretches ensuring that it falls snugly under the hand. Guitarists with big fingers might find it tricky to avoid muting the open E string, so keep the index finger pointing at the neck.

Interesting and colourful variations on A minor also fall comfortably under the fingers. It's a great key for songwriters too,as chords IV and V, Dm, E or Em, are available as open-string chords. The modal seventh, G, also sounds superb in sequences alongside A minor. It can be useful in major keys too, being chord II in G, chord III in F and chord VI in C.

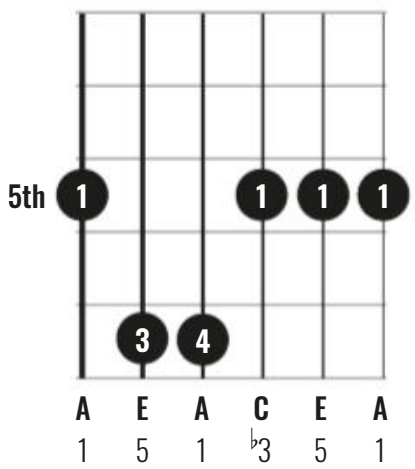
The notes of A minor are A, C and E. These are the root, minor third and perfect fifth, steps one, three and five of an A minor scale. Enjoy playing and experimenting with these chords – we'll see you next month.

Am



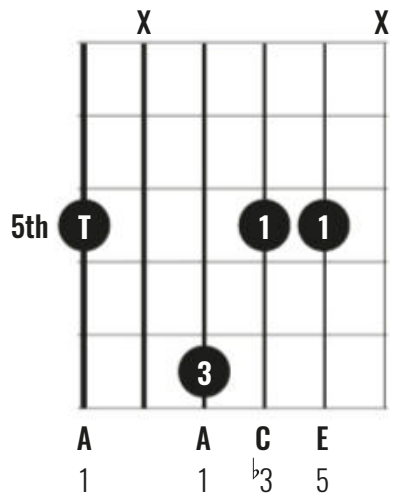
Try strumming the top five strings of the guitar open and then hammer on the three fingers that make the chord, keeping the rhythm going. You can also hold the chord down and just hammer on the first finger; artists from Neil Young to Noah Cyrus can be heard using this trick. Try to avoid playing the open sixth string, even if you have to allow your thumb over the edge of the neck to mute it.

Am



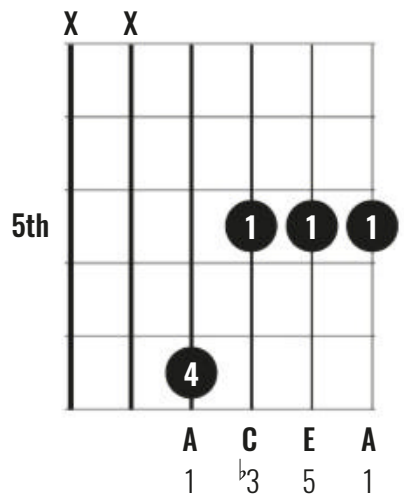
The trusty movable barre chord gives us A minor at the fifth fret – and beginners often find this one quite a handful. It can be tough to apply enough pressure to the G string to get the note to sound cleanly, particularly on steel-string acoustics. The trick is to apply even pressure across the index finger and not to pull from the elbow. It'll take some practise but you'll get there.

Am



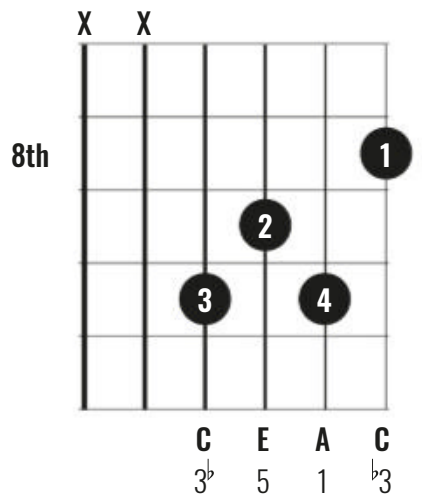
Four-note voicings often sound better than full barre chords, though the thumb-over technique we're suggesting here can be difficult for those with small hands. Wedge the first finger in to hold down the G and B strings but mute the top string. You can also do this with fingers one and two and then stretch finger four out to hold down the D string.

Am



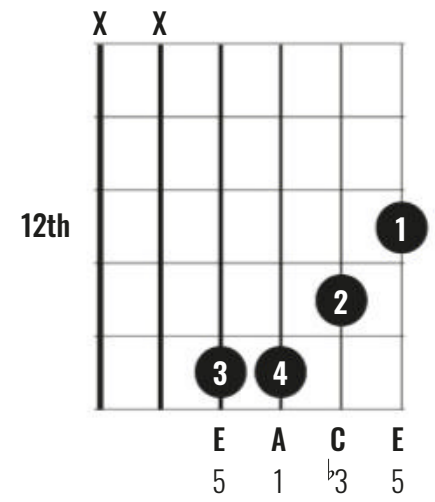
Here's another four-note voicing, this time focusing on the top four strings. High voicings such as this are useful for choppy rhythm parts and chord/melody arrangements. When the root note of a chord is in the bass (as it is here), we say that it's in "root position". Chords sound strongest when in root position.

Am/C



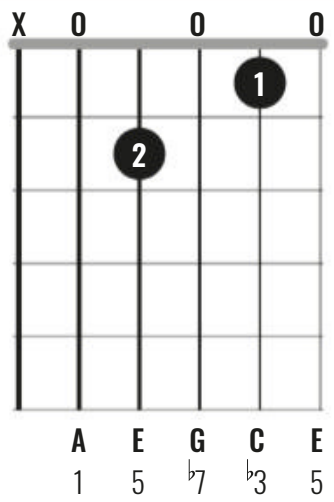
This is another high four-note voicing, only this time the chord is in first inversion because the note C, the minor third, is in the bass. If you're playing a part that demands you stay on one chord for a long time, you can make it more interesting by switching between different inversions while you play.

Am/E



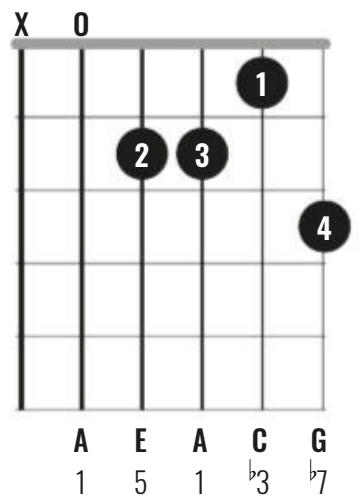
Completing the full set of inversions, we now have the second inversion, with the fifth, the E note, in the bass. This is the same as if you played the top four strings of the open chord (figure 1) except we're now an octave higher. You could also play the last three examples and sound the open A string, though technically they would all then be in root position.

Am7



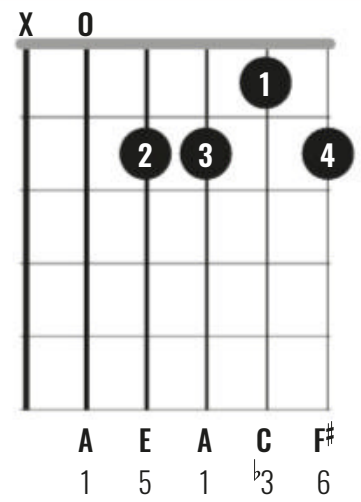
Removing finger three from the open-position chord introduces the open G, the minor seventh, producing an A minor seven chord. Minor sevenths seem more mellow than plain minors, with a hint of jazz. Try recording a loop on Am7 and D7 and playing a Santana-style solo using an A blues scale.

Am7



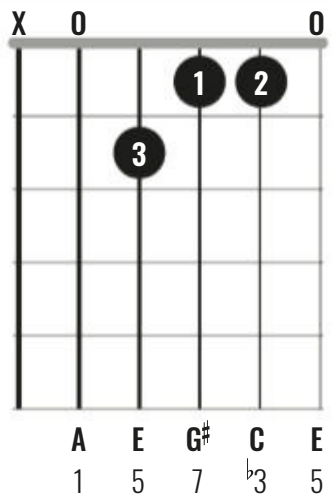
Here, we've taken the minor seventh up an octave to a more prominent position at the top of the chord. Switching between A minor and this voicing of Am7 creates melodic interest and adds movement, as can be heard in that most obscure of Led Zeppelin songs, *Stairway To Heaven*.

Am6



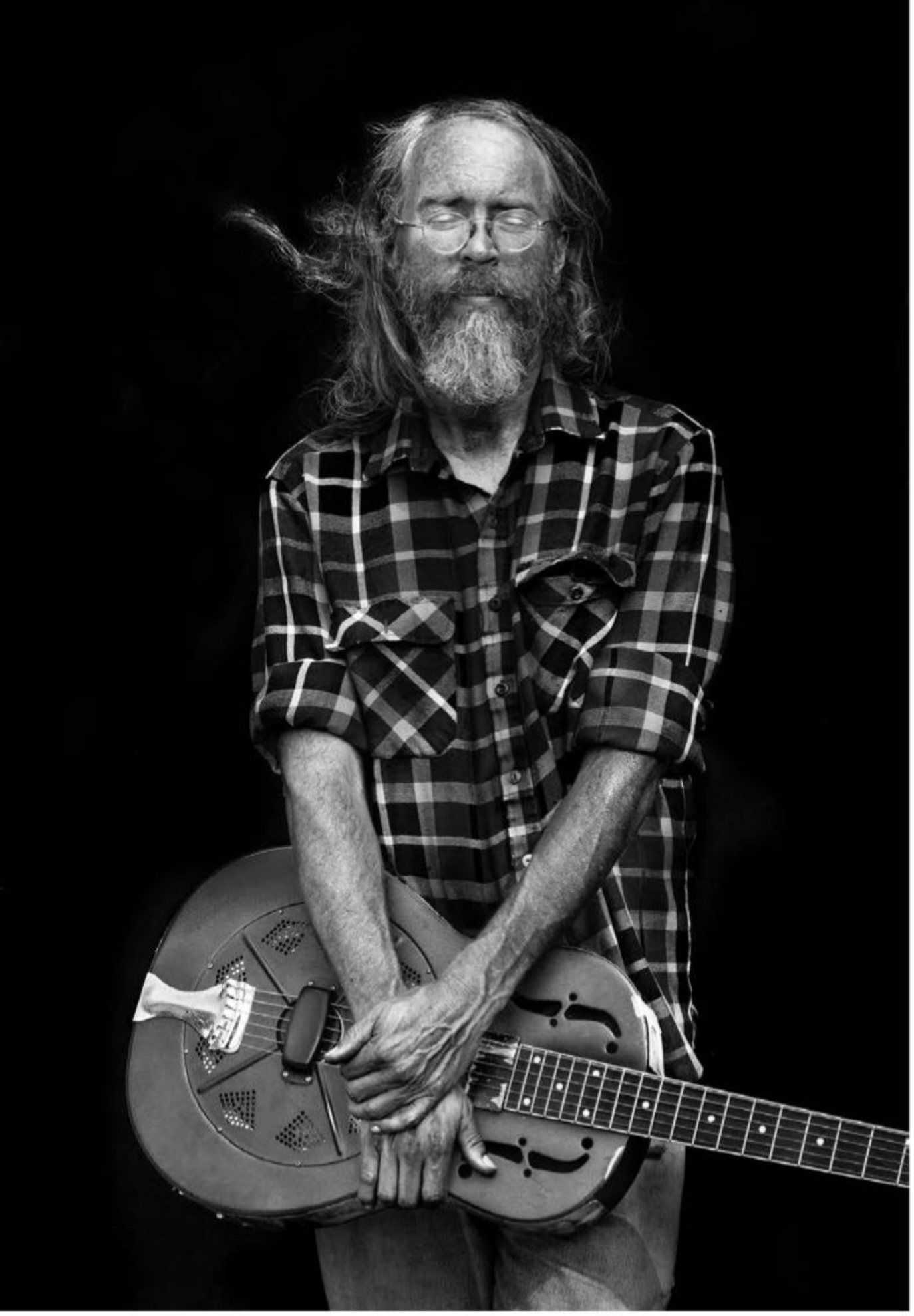
Where there is a minor seventh, the minor sixth can't be far behind. Here, we've slipped finger four down one fret to the F♯, which is the major sixth interval above A. It may seem contradictory but a minor sixth chord is produced by adding the major sixth to a minor chord. Minor sixths have an expectant quality and follow minor sevenths well.

Am^{maj7}



If you can add a major sixth to a minor chord, it figures that you can also add a major seventh. Here, we drop back down the octave to add G sharp to our A minor shape. A minor major seven is a chord packed with mystery and ambiguity. But it's not as uncommon as you might think, particularly as a passing chord between A minor and A minor seven. Try adding D7 at the end of this sequence.

Rod Fogg is a London-based guitarist, teacher and writer. He is the author of *The Ultimate Guitar Course* (Race Point 2014), *The Electric Guitar Handbook* (Backbeat, 2009) and contributed to bestseller *The Totally Interactive Guitar Bible* (Jawbone Publishing, 2006). Find out more at rodfogg.com



TALKBOX

CHARLIE PARR

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

The Minnesotan on teaching himself jazz guitar, dragging his jacket across the stage, and why his Mule tricone might be the closest he'll ever get to a signature model

The moment it all started...

"Listening to records from my dad's collection of solo folk-blues musicians when I was seven or eight started the guitar obsession that I still have. I was and am very inspired by solo guitarists and have always wanted to learn how to navigate a song entirely on my own. Probably typical for an introvert, I don't know."

I couldn't live without my...

"I'd have a hard time getting by without a resonator. I've had one for almost all of my playing life and I've come to rely on the particular set of sounds they're capable of."

The one that got away...

"I had a 1933 National Duolian C series – 12 frets, rolled f-holes – that I traded to Don Young, then owner of National Resophonic, for a custom 12-string. I loved the 12-string and played it a lot but I still miss that Duolian. It had Honeyboy Edwards' signature on it. I couldn't tour with it, so it felt like a solid decision at the time… but it wasn't."

My signature model...

"The Mule tricone that I currently play is as close as I'd get to a signature guitar. It has a custom-made mini-humbucker from Ted Vig, and a nice chunky neck profile. Plus, a saddle made from deer shed – antler that falls off naturally – that gives a nice sharp tone without being too trebly. Either that or some kind of small-bodied 12-string like Todd Cambio builds."

The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...

"It depends on how it's tuned. Lately I love playing *Dupree Blues* in standard and that comes out first. If the guitar is in D, it's usually *Vestapol* and if it's G then I play *St Louis Blues*."

The best advice I've ever been given...

"Don't rest your fingers on the guitar while you play. Advice that I find very difficult to follow but when I do, I find that my timing is much better."

My Spinal Tap moment...

"I opened a show in Galway for Mundy and before I walked onstage, I had taken my jacket off. But it was hooked into the back of my pants. It was travelling along with me all the way to the mic but I didn't realise it. I couldn't figure why everyone was laughing at me."

My guilty pleasure...

"I never feel guilty about musical pleasure. Lately I've had the Minutemen's *Double Nickels On The Dime* on constant rotation, and I never turn Boston off when they come on the radio."

The first thing on my rider...

"Coffee. All day."

I wish I was there...

"Does Newport Folk Festival 1964 count as one gig? To see Skip James, Robert Pete Williams and Mississippi John Hurt all on the same day!"

If I could just play one thing...

"Jazz. But I'm learning and practising. I think it's a matter of putting in the hours. There's not much you can't at least get a bite out of if you put the time in."

Charlie Parr's new album, *Last Of The Better Days Ahead*, is out now via Smithsonian Folkways

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